

**THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON USERS ATTITUDE TOWARD ONLINE  
SHOPPING**

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**BY**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism & Public Relations, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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## **Abstract**

Internet studies has gained popularity amongst academics and researchers in the field of Media Communication over the years, due to its' ever growing influence and contributions towards the global economy. The evolution of the Internet, too, has played a significant role in revolutionising the traditional forms of communications and media broadcasting, which in fact, has led to change in other fields, particularly advertising. We have observed the change that advertising has undertaken and how it has become a complex process of analysing data in order to reach a targeted group of audiences. Particularly on social media platforms, which evidently has become part of the majority of societies daily life. Social media has a growing daily sign up rate. The evolution of the Internet and the World Wide Web, has created a new era of conducting shopping online also known as E-Transactions (online shopping). It has changed over time and is continuously gaining popularity among society today.

Henceforth, the proposed study, to identify if a relationship between the time spent on social media in relation to users' online shopping attitudes exists, as the primary objective. The secondary objective, was to test the effectiveness of online advertising (targeted advertising), by identifying the time users spent on social media platforms, in relation to the frequency of them clicking or purchasing from online advertisements. A survey of 10 questions distributed to 261 participants was conducted and the results identified that 80.1% of participants shopped online, regardless of the time they spent on social media. We then tested this results against the data obtained on the effectiveness of online advertising in redirecting users to online websites and we found that, the time spent on social media platforms had no influence towards the frequency of users clicking on online advertisements or purchasing from them. We suggested

that, though advertising may not play a direct influence, it does tell users what to think about.

Based on the data analysed, we could conclude that online shopping does not happen at random in most instances, it has become an activity by itself within society. Considering online shopping as norm would be no mistake as based on the study conducted and the data we receive we could not find any possible influence of the variables tested against shopping online.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Background information.....	8
1.2 Research aims and questions .....	11
1.3 Research approach and scope .....	12
1.4 Expected Results .....	13
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Overview.....	14
2.2 Effects Theory on Media.....	15
2.1.1 The First Phase.....	19
2.1.2 The Second Phase .....	20
2.1.3 The Third Phase .....	21
2.3 Social Media.....	22
2.3.1 Representation of Social Structures on the Internet.....	26
2.3.2 Impact of Social Context on Online Shopping .....	26
2.3.3 Advertising on Social Media .....	27
2.4 Online Shopping.....	29
2.5 Algorithm & User Personalization .....	33
2.5.1 User Profile Personalization Process.....	35
2.6 Online Advertising.....	37
2.6.1 History.....	37
2.6.2 Targeted Advertising .....	38
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1 Overview.....	41
3.2 Quantitative Research.....	43
3.2.1 Quantitative Research (Survey) .....	44
3.2.2 Strengths and Weaknesses.....	50
3.2.3 Distribution Platforms .....	52
3.2.4 Research Tools .....	53
3.2.5 Sampling and target audience.....	53
3.3 Definition of Research Problem .....	55
3.4 Collection & Analysing data.....	57
3.5 Ethical Issues.....	58
3.6 Challenges.....	60
<b>Chapter 4: Findings and Results .....</b>	<b>62</b>
4.1. Overview.....	62
4.2 Analysis of survey.....	62
4.2.1 Variable 1 .....	64
4.2.2 Variable 2 .....	67
4.2.3 Variable 3 .....	70
4.2.4 Additional Data.....	75

4.3 Conclusion .....	78
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion &amp; Discussion.....</b>	<b>80</b>
5.1 Conclusion .....	80
5.1.1 Research Question 1.....	80
5.1.2 Research Question 2.....	81
5.1.3 Research Question 3.....	83
5.2 Discussion .....	84
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>90</b>
List of Diagram.....	90
List of Tables.....	90
List of Equations .....	90
List of Charts .....	90

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background information**

Technology has truly evolved from its humble beginnings and every day we continue to observe new innovations in the field of technology. Mobile phones (smartphones) and social media networking, have become an integral part of societies life. The communication process between individuals has been made easier with the constant evolution of technology – people are now able to keep in touch with friends and family all around the world. This revolution in time, has helped in the reconstruction of the media field too, with how media is consumed in comparison to the traditional forms of media consumption. With the creation of online websites and portals which allow users to read the news on the go, watch live streams or even videos online, the method of media consumption is literally in the pocket of the users, where smartphones and tablets allow people to have access from anywhere they are. While being an influence on the media and communication industry, the growth of the technological field has created the opportunity for progression in other fields which contributes to the global economy - such as the E-Commerce industry. Online transactions between business to business (B2B), business to consumers (B2C), consumer to business and consumer to consumer (Balasudarsun *et al.*, 2018), began gaining momentum in its' growth in the 1990's after the invention of the world wide web. In order for users to have access to these websites and media content, they are required to have access to the internet which is a highly complex intertwine of networks which allow for the transfer of data, in real time– which is also known as the “information highway” (Andrews, no date).



The operational functions of these two mediums play a crucial role in the development of social media networking and online retailers which in essence leads to online shopping. Henceforth, it is of relevance to be mentioned and to be understood before moving further. The World Wide Web, plays a significant role in this phenomenon as it works as a portal which allows for the creation of social media networking sites and e-commerce platforms (online shops). Since the creation of the world wide web, multiple social media platforms have emerged, even though some of them may have shut down since. They have contributed towards the communication process and ideology which social media networking platforms offer their users. Some that are still fully operational today, for example, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are platforms that have similar characteristics that allow users to share content and communicate with their friends, followers or fans. In addition to social networking websites that are commonly used for communication and sharing content, there are other purely media based platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube and Vimeo, that allow the users to be their own content creators.

With such a high number of users on these platforms, it is just to give attention, to the study of using these social media platforms in the field of social determinism of technology and the effects it has on users. The use of these media platforms, allow for users to create their own content, whether it be video, music, photography or to even share their artwork online. The ability of users to generate their own content has led to the popularisation of Youtubers', Snapchatters' and Instagrammers', who are essentially online content creators with an ever growing following and fanbase. Creating content and sharing it on different social networking platforms, in order to gain more followers and fans, allows them to build a business reputation on their social

media accounts. Such individuals are of interest to advertising practitioners, as proposed by (Thompson and Malaviya, 2013), *“there are several reason companies may solicit user-generated content for their advertising campaigns. Involving the customer in advertising development is expect to provide valuable insights and build a sense of collaboration engagement with consumers”* (Thompson and Malaviya, 2013).

In addition to that, new age advertising has increased focus on advertising online. As a result, these platforms expose their users to more advertisements and marketing online. This phenomenon raises a very important question, which needs to be answered, to better understand the relationship between the social media networking and e-commerce field. How does social media networking contribute to the e-commerce industry? No doubt, advertising is an important element of marketing that allows businesses and brand owners to ‘push’ their products to the consumers. However, how has the change in media platforms contributed to the growth of these industries. With the study of this paper we intend to answer this question. As highlighted by Musso and Merletti (2016) – *“the internet and the World Wide Web in particular have dramatically changed the way in which many companies operate. On the Web, even the smallest and most localised business has a potential global reach”*(Musso and Merletti, 2016). To understand the role that social networking sites play as a platform for advertising and targeting audiences, this paper will study on how targeted advertising on social media networking sites affect user online purchasing choices. An important element of this study is understanding the basis of biasness in algorithm filtering and personalization as proposed by (Bozdag, 2013). This discusses the implementation of algorithms to assist users on social networking sites to deal with the overflow of data and information they are exposed to on the internet, (Bozdag, 2013).

It suggests that, users online activities and patterns are recognised and these data are run through a complex series of algorithms, in order to suggest information the user needs, wants and also who the user knows on the social networking websites based on their online user profiles (Bozdag, 2013). The study of algorithmic bias filtering on social networks plays an important role in advertising and marketing, as it allows for the specific targeting of advertisements towards users, which in turn could contribute towards their online purchasing habits. As mentioned, social media platforms to a certain degree has changed the way in which advertising and marketing is done today. If observed on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, it is very likely to come across advertisements for products and merchandise. These advertisements are usually targeted through the collection of data of the users activities on-line. Of which, the data is analysed through a complex array of algorithms which then identify the type of content and advertisement to target at that particular demographic of users who share similar characteristics of online attitudes. Therefore the study of the effects theory will play a significant role in this research paper in order to study the relationship between the extensive usage of social media platforms and the effects it has on the users online shopping attitudes/habits. In order to identify if there is a relationship between the time spent online and their shopping attitudes.

## **1.2 Research aims and questions**

This paper proposes the study of the 'Effects of Social Media on User Attitude Towards Online Shopping' by examining the co-relation between time spent on social media platforms and users online purchasing habits. Firstly, by understanding the effect of algorithmic biasness in relation to how users treat targeted online advertising we will

be able to observe if this has any implications towards their online purchasing habit. Secondly, we understand how various forms of advertising have moved from traditional media communication towards new media communication and the effectiveness of the transfer towards targeted advertising on social media websites. In order to achieve this, a survey was set up with a range of questions which would allow the results to reflect this co-relation. A sample of 261 people were set in place to be achieved, and the survey was distributed through Facebook and Instagram.

**RQ1: How does the consumption of social media influence a user's online purchasing habits?**

**RQ2: How effective is targeted advertising in redirecting users?**

**RQ3: Does the prolonged exposure to media advertisements influence user's purchasing habits?**

### **1.3 Research approach and scope**

This study employs the Effects Theory to understand the causal relations between social media consumption and online purchasing habits of users. We will be conducting a detailed research into existing literature to identify the gaps in previous literature in order to help us with our research. By doing so, we will be able to refine our research questions and identify the variables which need to be tested, in order to determine the findings of which will answer our research questions. Once the variables are identified a survey will be designed with a specific sample size (which represents the sample population of study) - this will then be distributed to the public through different social media communication platforms, in order to obtain the data we require for the successful completion of this study. Upon reaching our targeted sample size,

the survey will be closed, and the data will be collected and analysed. The analysed data will be discussed using tables and charts to indicate the relationship between the proposed variables.

#### **1.4 Expected Results**

With this paper, the intention is to identify the co-relation between the time invested on social media by an individual and whether this has an impact towards their decision or likelihood to enter into any consumer to business transactions online (online shopping). Where previous studies had highlighted both the negative and positive impact between cumulative social networking site usage towards online shopping, this paper intends to focus on the direct co-relation between time spent on social media and shopping online. The objective to show if social media advertising has an influence on people's online shopping habits, will be analyzed in this research, observing how different marketing and advertising strategies are carried out on social media platforms. This will allow for the observation of successful advertising and marketing online. This study too will allow for the understanding of the effectiveness of online advertising (targeted advertising), in pursuing and influencing a user's online shopping behavior. We expect to see that, a user's online shopping behavior does not significantly relate to how much time is spent on social media networking sites, as online shopping has grown in popularity and is starting to become the choice of many without being influenced by any 3<sup>rd</sup> party.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

The literature review will cover 5 key topics that will be relevant for defining the research approach and understanding the results. Each section adding relevance and importance to the study of this paper. Also studying the influence social media networking has, in relation to the shopping patterns of users, which leads to the contribution to the e-commerce industry globally.

Identifying the origins of the Internet and the transformation process it has gone through in order to be what it is today is important for this research. The discussion of how the internet sparked the ideology in the minds of the creators who created the means for social media websites to operate on the internet and how this has led to the innovation of technology in the field of communications and media, will be important too - due to this being suggested as the reasoning behind a new era of technology and has revolutionised the traditional forms of communication, media consumption and creation, broadcast and etc. Social media networking which has also lent a helping hand in the growth of the E-Commerce industry, will be studied in order to identify the factors which influence this co-relation. The breakdown of the components which allow for social media networking to operate will be important in this research to identify the relationship between social media usage and users online shopping habits. We will then move on to identify how advertising has progressively followed the evolution of technology particularly in the field of media and how it has created new methods of advertising for the new media platforms that are available to them. Finally, understanding how marketing and advertising agencies use data provided to them (paid data or unpaid), in order to specifically target a particular group of audiences.

## **2.2 Effects Theory on Media**

The Effects Theory is one out of the three studies that has helped with the research of television audience's behaviour towards the consumption of television. Under the study of media effects of television there are a few theories which fall under the same scope, such as : Cultivation Theory, Exemplification Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Third-person Effect and Effects of Media Violence. For this paper we will be looking at the generalisation of the Effects Theory and its' importance. The Effects Theory has three different phases that has been developed over the years . The study of the effects approach was popular from 1920 to 1960 (Abercrombie, 1996). This plays an important role in how media organisations and marketers use media today. Reaching the masses and advertising is the main objective of their broadcast. But it raises the question of : How effective are their messages? Are they affecting the audience in the way we want it to? In terms of marketers – are their advertising campaigns hitting the right target audience in order to generate an effect causing the audience to purchase a product? These are important questions to be addressed in order to ensure that there is an effective communication and marketing workflow when using media platforms and mediums. It is important to give attention to the fact that there are various platforms and methods of media sharing today. The next part of the analysis will highlight on how media consumption today does play an extensive role in the influence of its audiences. For example, how media has a certain influence on societies lifestyle choices and buying patterns.

Effects approach framework was the study of how television viewing had an impact on the audiences directly. The Effects Theory suggested that audiences react to what they view on television and consume from other sources of media. For example, if an

audience is exposed to violent content over a long period of time, he or she is more likely to develop a violent attitude in their personal life. It is also suggested that the broadcast of elections and political campaigns were more likely to influence the outcome of the elections by affecting the way the audience saw the political parties and thus influencing their votes. Though this was the foundation of the creation of the Effect's Framework, later academic research suggests that this hypothesis is only applicable to certain instances and not for all the cases. *"Television and the media, generally were found not to have direct effect and to be less powerful in moulding beliefs, attitudes and behaviour than other factors, such as personal influence"* (Abercrombie, 1996). This suggests that, this hypothesis is not entirely accurate and should not be applied to all circumstances that co-relate exposure towards the television in relation to audiences change in behaviour. On this note, it is important that a closer understanding and analysis of this theory be examined in order to determine the circumstances in which the Effects Theory applies and to which target audiences. In addition to that, exploring the ideology presented by (Katz, Lazarsfeld and Roper, 1955) which showed that *"media have an effects through a 'two-step flow', in which influential people are affected by media messages and then pass on that effect, in a mediated and diluted form to others"* (Abercrombie, 1996).

Media organisations, over the years, have identified different categories of audiences. Usually unknown to the audiences, they are classified in one of these categories and it is by no accident that they are put into said categories. Asa Barger states that *"each of us may think of ourselves as unique individuals, but for marketers our distinctive identities are of no concern – we're all, as far as they are concerned, members of some group or category based on demographics ( Our age, gender, race, ethnicity),*



*psychographics (values and beliefs), or something else”(Berger, 2007).* Marketers and media professionals use these categories or groups to identify how to make, share and broadcast media content accordingly so that the content will be of interest to the viewers from each group. Understanding this will be of importance in a later stage of this paper – as this will help us to understand why certain groups are much more vulnerable to the Effects Approach Theory and why some groups are not. Besides the common groupings and demographics of the audiences, marketers have found another way of grouping the audience which is by identifying audiences psychographics- *“marketers and media researches also break audiences down on the basis of psychographics – the psychological characteristics of audiences”* (Berger, 2007). Here he suggest that there are two types of audience ‘sub-groupings’ or ‘typologies’ i.e. for various audience subgroupings based on whether members are “inner-directed” (think for themselves) or “outer-directed” (follow others) and categories like that”(Berger, 2007). (Berger, 1998) writes that these ‘psychographic marketing theorists’ suggests that the values and beliefs of media audiences are of much more importance than the demographics due to the fact that their demographics may not always be the same. This suggests that audiences are more likely to indulge in television programs that represent their values and beliefs and in a way that, these shows strengthen their values and believes.

The development and evolution of technology has been a great influence in the way that media is consumed by audiences today. Compared to when newspaper, radio and television used to be the main platforms of media consumption. The internet now plays a key role in how media is consumed. Livingstone (2004) notes that *“given the growing range of information and communication technologies which come under the*

*heading of 'media studies', audience research must ask itself whether its theories and methods are tied to a historically specific medium – mass broadcast television – or whether instead there are lessons from the study of mass television and its audience which can guide the analysis of the new media environment” (Livingstone, 2004).* This evolution can also create new platforms from which users can consume media and therefore create new models of communication that are based on the key principles of the older theories. For example, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) – *“showed how the media may have an effect through a ‘two-step flow’(Abercrombie, 1996).* This suggested that a person of influence who gets affected by something is more likely to pass that effect on to their followers. This is a phenomenon which has become of great popularity in media consumption today, with the creation of ‘social media influencers’, ‘food bloggers’, reviewers and celebrity endorsements(for particular brands) and etc. They create a following by publishing media content which appeals to specific demographics. By doing so they then focus on creating a large enough following which makes them relevant to the brand or product which is in the similar field of industry as the content they create. Corporations and brands are more likely to give these influencers products ‘media drops’ in order for the said influencer to create either a video, blog post, Instagram story, Facebook post, etc and to promote the particular brand or product. From here we can see that these audience theories, even though they are from a different era of media consumption and creation they, do bare a significant relevance in the media field today. In addition to that, as Fornas et al. (2002: 23) states *“recent digital technologies have radically enhanced these kinds of interactivity by explicitly emphasizing the user’s response and active assistance in the formation of the media text itself and by developing particular tools to facilitate this”* (Livingstone, 2004). This new emphasis has led to the extension of arguments with

regards to the 'Active Audience Theories' and implementing it into mainstream media. The Effects Theory is a theory that interprets the effects of media towards an audience with higher cumulative media consumption. It is one of the most used theories to understand the effects of media on individuals behaviour. Though this theory, was popularised for the study of users behaviours towards television consumption, it can be used as a framework to study the effects of new age media communication and its' effects on the users. In this section we will explore three main phases of the Effects Theory, with each phase contributing to the creation of three different effects model which were to be classified as either "significant" or "minimal" media effects, based on their characteristics (see Bryant and Thompson, 2002 ; McQuail, 2010 ; Noelle-Neumann, 1973; Wartella & Middlestadt,1991) , Borah (2016):

- 1) The First Phase
- 2) The Second Phase
- 3) The Third Phase

### **2.1.1 The First Phase**

The first phase started in the 1920's and the 1930's is considered a significant effects phase that is often associated with the 'magic bullet' or 'hypodermic needle' metaphors. These metaphors presented the ideology that "messengers shoot messages and effects into receivers" (Borah, 2016). It was during this time period where media began to enter into peoples' daily lives, that the media was given the reputation of being a force of shaping opinions, attitudes and behaviours of society, Borah (2016). A valid argument which is still present the field of media study today, which commonly associates media communication to possess the capabilities of social change is by Williams (1990) which states "*it is an immensely powerful and*

*now largely orthodox view of the nature of social change. New technologies are discovered, by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress” (Williams, 1990). A clear observation of this suggestion can be observed with the introduction of social networking sites and smartphones which were created as tool of communication but now has contributed to the change in different aspects of society. Often during the discussion of the first phase of the Effects Theory, Harold Laswell is quoted in his claims that “society and individuals could be effectively controlled by a minority through propaganda – Harold Laswell (1927) ” (Borah, 2016).*

### **2.1.2 The Second Phase**

The second phase, is considered a Minimal Effects Phase. During this phase the improvement of much complex scientific methods were notable in Communications Theory (McQuail, 2010) (Borah, 2016). The development during the phase allowed researchers to question some of the earlier assumptions which had been presented by theorists (Borah,2016). This second stage of the process rejected the earlier thinking of “the old hypothesis that the media have great power (De Fleur & Dennis, 1981, pp.294-297)” (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). Derived from the summary of research by Paul Lazarsfeld’s student: The Effects of Mass Communication (Klapper, 1960) – he identified several criteria which influenced one’s decisions based on the media consumed. Klapper noted that *“only a tiny fraction of voters actually changed their voting intentions during an election campaign, that audience motivations and prior beliefs influenced the interpretation of persuasive messages, and the messages were often discussed among opinion leaders and friends, leading to a mediation via two-step flow, as the narrative is told, reinforced this minimal-effects*

*conclusion*”(Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). The theory by (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) became a commonly cited theory in this phase and helped to interpret the Media Effects Theory. Klapper (1960) argues “that the effects of mass communication merely reinforced predispositions and do not directly influence them” (Borah, 2016). The representation of this argument in the second phase allowed for it to reach its’ peak and therefore driving researches to speculate that there may not be a ‘direct or one-to-one-link’, between the messages sent out by media and the influence it has on the audiences. This draws the conclusion that the effects of media was not as straight forward as expected. This model can be utilised in studies to identify the influence of other individuals on each other in relation to their online purchasing behaviours of products. As the increase in online product reviewers have become much prominent in society today, the Limited Effects Model will be a good basis to form observations and studies on the co-relation between online product reviewers and their capabilities of influencing consumers purchasing behaviours online.

### **2.1.3 The Third Phase**

The third phase of the Effects Theory was fuelled by the “unfair and dismissive minimal-effects notion” (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). This led the desire in new scholars, to prove the different “not so minimal effects” (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982) and also to prove that “*if the media could not tell you what to think they were ‘stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about’*” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)” (Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). This phase proposed the notion that though Laswell’s theory was no longer feasible, the study on the long-term exposure towards media was important. This phase focused on the model proposed by (McQuail, 2010), that is the ‘Direct Effects Model’ and also on cumulative change. The

proposal of this new research model allowed for the focus on long-term influences, cultural patterns and institutional behaviours, with the intention to debunk the 'no effect' arguments of media effects. Researchers often commented on the past methods and model that took the orientation of psychological approach as opposed to the study on the long-term effects (cumulative effects) (Borah, 2016).

### **2.3 Social Media**

Though social networking was already a thing of that time, the introduction of the world wide web lent a helping hand in the growth in social media websites, *"The web helped popularize the Internet among the public, and served as a crucial step in developing the vast trove of information that most of us now access on a daily basis"* (Andrews, 2013). Since then, the emergence and growth of social media websites have been rapid: YouTube ( 2005 ), Facebook ( 2006 ), Twitter ( 2006 ) and Instagram ( 2010 ) ( *A Chronological History of Social Media*, 2018) have been key players in the social media networking scene and have influenced each other in one way or another. Some of them still fully operational today and are

growing ever so steadily, with daily increase in number of user signups.

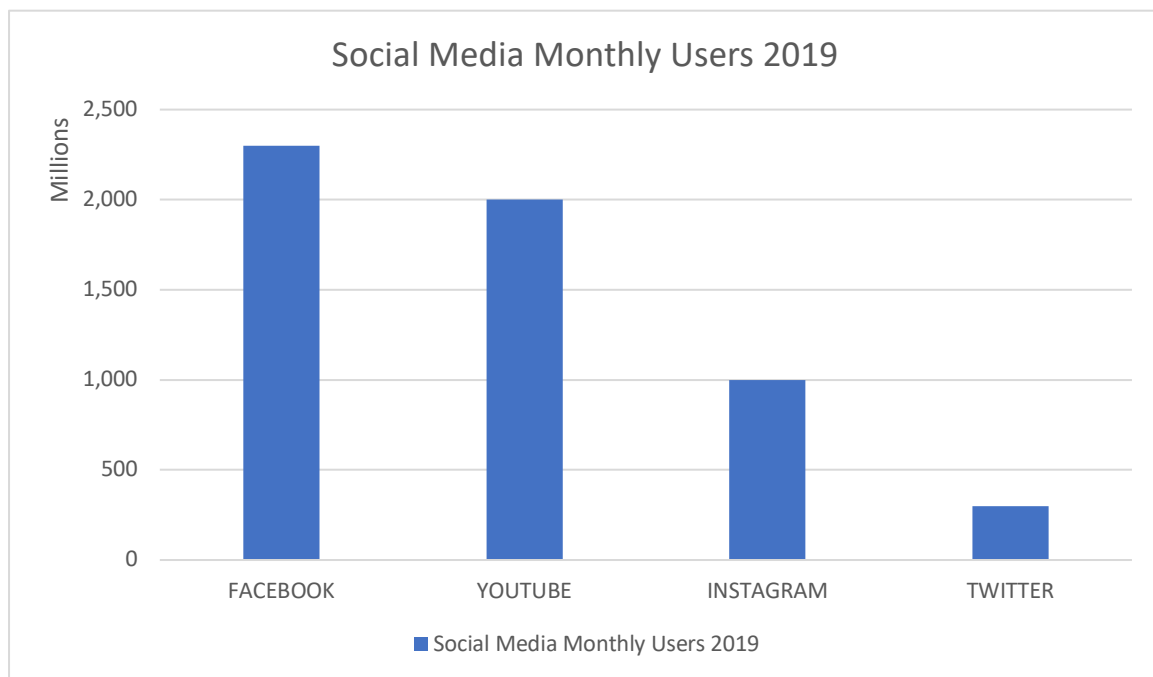


Chart 1: Social Media Month Users (2019)

*“Social media can broadly be defined as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content’ (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)” (Voorveld et al., 2018).* Since the popularisation of social media and its usage for many sorts of activities relating to broadcasting and mass communications, many scholars have studied the different uses of this media platform such as

- 2.3.1 Representation of Social Structure on the Internet
- 2.3.2 Impact of Social Context on Online Shopping
- 2.3.3 Advertising on social media

These three topics are common topics of interest in the field of media in relation to the study of the social media and the role social media plays in shaping societies' attitudes towards matter of interest and the impact social media can create on certain fields and advertising on social media. These papers have lent a helping hand towards practitioners in the media industry to understand and increase their ability to target audiences of different demographics. The three different topics play a significant role in the effective usage of social media networking to achieve a desired goal whether in terms of social study on behavioural changes, social media and online shopping, or advertising on social media.

The continuous growth in social media usage incorporated with the evolution of technology has led to the innovation of mobile phone applications (apps). The original interfaces of Social Media platforms were created for use on desktops or a computer. With the popularisation of smartphones, social media developers and programmers came up with the idea of creating phone applications so that their platforms could be accessible from mobile phones. Creating user friendly interfaces which work as well as the web browser version of the platforms was a crucial asset which these mobile applications needed to possess. A good example of a successful social media mobile application that is worth mentioning would be Facebook, when they launched their Facebook Lite mobile application which was an upgrade from their previous versions of Facebook application, in order to deal with users who had access to low-broadband speeds, allowing them to fully utilize the application and enjoy the full experience without frustrations (Goggin, 2014). By improving their mobile application to operate



smoothly and aiding towards customer satisfaction usage, Facebook reached a breaking point in terms of number of users they had signed up as a user of Facebook and they were growing constantly becoming the favourites in countries which were outside America (Goggin, 2014).

*“Indonesia for example, has been one of the countries where Facebook has been notably popular because of its mobile platform (Molaei, 2014), displacing the earlier Friendster platform (Kirkpatrick, 2011: 283)” (Goggin, 2014).* This is another factor which is arguably one of the most important ones for social media websites and eCommerce websites, creating an experience just as good for smartphone users, as the experience available for computer or laptop users. Facebook’s mobile application needs to be given the credit it is due, as without that, Facebook would not be the social media giants they are today. The reason for the attention given to this is for the study of social media effects on users shopping attitudes. Facebook together with Instagram and WhatsApp that they own, are one of the key players in the social media networking industry, as they have played a major role in the change in traditional advertising. Another important feature made popular by Facebook was the instantaneous sharing of photos taken by users, as is used in social media today. There is a high likelihood that an individual would post pictures, snapchats or Instastories of their recent purchases and this counts as free advertising for the brand or product. Facebook has created a platform which allows user to generate content, consume media and communicate with people from all around the world in so creating a global platform for advertising.

### **2.3.1 Representation of Social Structures on the Internet**

According to some literature by scholars, it is argued that there are a number of different categories of social structures which are found on the internet. Krämer and Conrad (2017) - highlighted in their paper 'Social Ontologies Online: The Representation of Social structure on the Internet', the methodological framework that can be used to identify these structures and how to classify them. Previous research has highlighted a few types of social structures that are commonly found to exist on the internet, Krämer and Conrad (2017). These are: communities, social relationships, networks or groups. This study proposes the a methodological framework to recognise and identify a full range of social forms which has been presented by researchers of the field (Krämer and Conrad, 2017). The paper acknowledges the role of data structure, algorithms and representations which play the role of representing social structures on the internet. *"Social structures are represented in data structures as universal types and instantiated in standardized tokens instead of capturing the particularities of relationships"* (Krämer and Conrad, 2017). The study of social structures on the internet and how to identify them, is essential in this study so as to understand how targeted advertising through algorithmics biasness is conducted.

### **2.3.2 Impact of Social Context on Online Shopping**

Social context, which is recognised as a 'dependent variable', is generally measured by two operating variables i.e. internal influences and external influences. Balasudarsun *et al.*, (2018), studies the influence these variables have on online shopping behaviours. In the paper, shopping behaviours are measured

in two different variables namely, 'planned purchases' and 'unplanned purchases' suggesting that, social context has the ability to influence a consumers online purchasing behaviour.

Quoting several different academic studies to identify some external factors "(1) advertisements positively impact consumers opinions (Balamurugan, Sathish, and Jublee, 2017), (2) electronic word of mouth (E-Wom), (Wood,2005), (3)consumers use of social media to write reviews on their experience (Odabasi and Odabasi, 2010) and (4) social media playing an important role in getting consumers to go online (Miller,2010)", (Balasudarsun *et al.*, 2018).

Doing the same for interpersonal influences he notes that "(1) consumers information of products from opinion leaders, friends, colleagues, experts and word of mouth (Gilly, Graham, Wofinbarger, and Yale 1998), (2)the size of family influences consumers online shopping habits (Richa, 2012), (3) identifying that family members are the main source of reference in a group and they have a big impact on online purchasing behaviours (Thomson, Laing, and McKee, 2007)", (Balasudarsun *et al.*, 2018). Allowing for the implementation of these variables towards our study, we are able to create a much more specific focus of the study on social media influences by ruling out the already tested variables of influences towards online shopping habits of consumers.

### **2.3.3 Advertising on Social Media**

Due to the positive impact that advertising has on social media, it has become a popular choice of advertising. It allows advertisers to reach a wider target audience, globally at a lower cost in comparison to the traditional forms of advertising. Besides cost and wider reach, the ability to monitor the interactions

from the advertisements and the ability to target different advertisement towards different audiences, makes it a more effective form of communication. Social media advertising allows for digital engagement on these media platforms, as discussed by Voorveld, Noort, Muntinga, Bronner (2018) – *“the effectiveness of such digital engagement programs is usually assessed with social media monitoring tools provider quantitative metrics, such as the number of likes, shares, comments, opens, views, followers, or clicks as indicators of level of engagement or valence of engagement (positive or negative comments)”* (Voorveld et al., 2018). Therefore, allowing advertising to get a detailed evaluation of monitoring the effectiveness of the engagement of an advertising program. Also proposing that, the manner of user engagement of a particular social media platform can influence their perception of how they engage with a particular advertisement based on the characteristics and tone of the social media platform. Voorveld, proposed four hypotheses for his study, (1) *“social media engagement experiences differ across social media platforms”*, (2) *“social media advertising engagement differs across social media platforms”*, (3) *“engagement with a social media platform is positively related to social media advertising evaluations, and this relations is contingent on the social media platform”*, and (4) *“[a] engagement with a social media platform is related to engagement with advertising on that platform, and [b] social media advertising engagement subsequently affects social media advertising evaluations”* (Voorveld et al., 2018). As a result of this hypothesis we intend to identify users who were more active on social media networking platforms who were either more likely or less likely to interact with social media advertising, to understand the influence on their online purchasing choices.

## 2.4 Online Shopping

Online shopping, also known as eCommerce, is significant in its' contributions towards the global economy and there is an outpouring of studies in this field, to better understand the workings and infrastructure of this phenomenon. These studies and scholarly articles are important and useful to market experts to best create a great experience for online shoppers, aiding their ability to maintain existing customers and to acquire new customers in the process. As (Huseynov and Yildirim, 2016) mentions, in his paper on 'Internet users' attitudes toward business-to-consumer online shopping', he points out that there is more to eCommerce than just shopping online. Actions such as, electronic payments, online ticketing and internet banking, are all actions classified as types of electrical commerce transaction (Huseynov and Yildirim,2016). Defining the e-commerce industry as *"conducting, transactions and facilitating business activities over computer networks"*(Huseynov and Yildirim, 2016), he points out the increasing popularity of this being practiced by people(users), government bodies, and businesses (private or corporate), to engage in this form of transactions. He quotes a recent survey conducted by (Kristen, 2011), which indicates that, *"online shopping is among the most common types of activities conducted over the Internet (Kristen,2011)"*(Huseynov and Yildirim, 2016). Being a game changer in comparison to the traditional style of shopping, online shopping has revolutionised the manner in which people can shop for products. This has created a more efficient and convenient way of shopping which allows users to browse catalogues and products from the comfort of their own home or even while they are out in a café having a coffee. Online shopping has reduced the time and money spent in terms of travelling, the convenience of not looking

for a parking place (if the shopper is driving) or having to rely on public transport (if the shopper is using public transport). In addition to efficiency and cost effective factors that online shopping offers to the users', it allows individuals to be able to browse the wider networks of the internet to obtain information on similar products at a price range which fits the shoppers budget. Therefore, this allows for price comparison without having to visit multiple shops and travel all over the place to do so. (Huseynov,2011), brings up the cost effectiveness for businesses to conduct trade via online websites (online shops), as this reduces the cost of running their business which then leads to price reductions for consumers. Online shopping also allows consumers to have the ability to shop at any given time, without being restricted to retail store operating hours. This also allows working professionals to shop after a long day at work without having to worry about rushing to the physical store to purchase what they need. This then, benefits the seller as working professionals have a higher spending capability and this results in higher sales activities for online businesses.

Without a doubt, the growth of the e-Commerce industry is significant in contributing to the global economy, where the global retail market is expected to reach a high of \$25.038 trillion dollars (€22.220trillion), projecting a 4.5% increase in growth in comparison to the year before this. This growth has dropped from the initial five years before, which projected a growth rate of 5.7% and 7.5% respectively (*eMarketer*, 2019). This indicated that the global retail market is predicted to continue to grow. Therefore, businesses and market experts need to be able to understand the factors that drive individuals to shop online. A very prominent research in the industry, often cited in this field is by (Li and Zhang, 2002) on 'Consumer Online

Shopping Attitudes and Behaviour'. This study examines the limitation of existing literature review in the field of consumer online shopping attitudes and behaviours and then provides a clear framework of the already existing understanding of this 'subfield'. An analysis of literature review which study external environment, demographics, personal characteristics, vender/service/product characteristics, website quality, attitudes towards online shopping, intention to shop online, online shopping decision making, online purchasing and consumer satisfaction were covered in this paper in order to identify areas of improvement in research and to propose some areas for future researches in this field (Li and Zhang, 2002).

In a paper 'Online Shopping and social Media: Friends or Foes?' by (Zhang *et al.*, 2017), he studies whether the usage of social media platforms influences an individual to shop online. He argues that, "*social networks can play a dual role in consumers' e-commerce buying behaviours. On the one hand, using social networks could be positively associated with purchasing because consumer on social networks are frequently exposed to information about products and consumption related activities*" (Zhang *et al.*, 2017) this proposes that social media could act as a double-edged-sword and could affect marketers who are using these social media networking platforms for advertising or marketing purposes. Focusing on two key arguments from this research that discusses the 'The Negative Correlation Between Immediate Social Networking Site Usage and E-commerce' – this suggests that, with no time 'allocation' towards online shops and social media platforms as a variable to this research, the use of social media platforms are more likely to increase the chances of an individual to purchase online (Zhang *et al.*, 2017). In contrary to that, if the allocation of time

is added to the picture (with greater time allocation towards social media platforms), this will lead to less time allocation to online shops, therefore reducing the purchasing activities of an individual on online shops. Another significant contribution of his paper is the study of “The Positive Correlation Between Cumulative Social Networking Site Usage and E-Commerce” – where he suggest that although it is discussed that the paramount use of social networking site is related to less shopping online by users, the increasing time a user spends on a social networking site (days, hours) – is related to an increase in ones’ buying behaviours. Relating this to the theory which was proposed by Gary S. Becker in his journal ‘ A Theory of the Allocation of Time ‘ (Becker,1965) which looks at lower returns in online shopping activity if users were to spend more time on social media networking, due to a lack of informational value for users – Zhang suggest that this is not entirely accurate as, *“although social networks may provide less information value than shopping sites, the initial incremental daily time spent on social networks may result in greater informational value than if the incremental time were spent on the shopping sites that have already received a substantial amount of consumers’ attention”*(Zhang *et al.*, 2017). This in turn results in greater online shopping activities by users due to the greater ‘informational value’ obtained by the user. It is also proven that users do spend some time in researching products and for some time period before purchasing (Huseynov and Yildirim, 2016). Their product research is carried out on external platforms or on the online shops website itself (Huseynov and Yildirim, 2016). These findings are contrary to a research conducted by International Business Management (IBM), which suggested that social media has not much of an impact on e-commerce, with only 0.34% of



online sales are referred by social media websites (Zhang et al., 2017), thus proposing that practitioners should not be discouraged by this especially during the start of online sales. Instead they should focus on allowing for the long-term cumulative social network usage of social media which will pay off in the reflection of increase in online sales (Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

In-line with informational value being obtain on social networking sites consumer reviews, online reviews, social media influencers, user generated content and celebrity endorsements, have recently become a new form of marketing which is popular on social media networking sites. Playing a significant role in the users shopping habits, “a recent survey by comScore (2007)), an Internet marketing research company, finds that 24% of Internet users access online reviews before paying for a service delivered offline” (Zhu and Zhang, 2010). We will discuss this in more depth in the next part of the reviews of literature, where we will look at the effects of Electronic Word Of mouth (eWom) and the influence of influencers, online reviewers and celebrity endorsements, towards users shopping habits.

## **2.5 Algorithm & User Personalization**

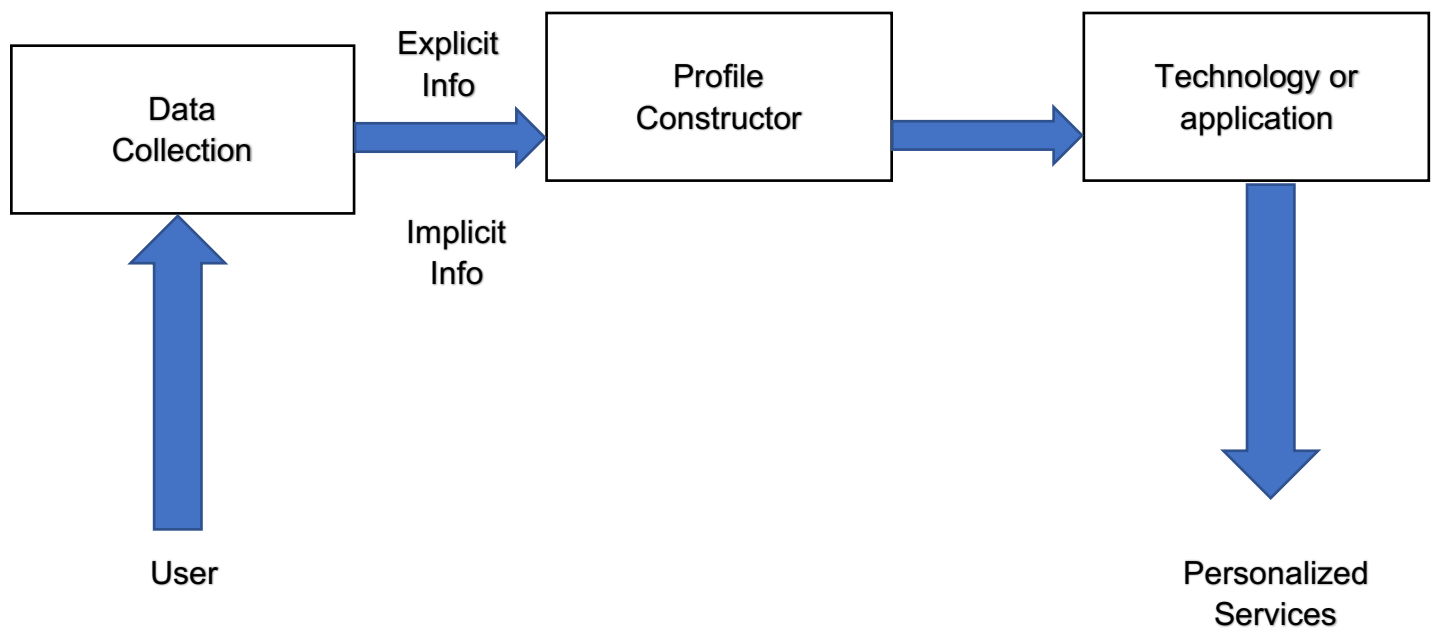
With overflowing amount of information and data available on the internet, it is hard for users to filter through them all to decide what they want to see and what is relevant to them. Particularly on social media networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram users are exposed to millions of different accounts that create their own content. This raises the question of, how does a user filter through all this content? Bozdag (2013) noted in his study, that due to this

increase in data and information gatekeepers like Facebook and Google have *“recently started to introduce personalization features, algorithms that filter information per individual”* (Bozdag, 2013) by introducing an illusionary middle person (algorithms) which helps users to filter content and data which are generated by other users or information providers. It is argued that, these algorithms create an online profile of the users ‘likes’ by collecting their usage data, e.g. their buying, searching, communicating and sharing patterns Bozdag (2013). Performing these different activities on the internet and social media, creates a digital trace which is then recorded as data. Some classify this as a new form of social information (Halford *et al.*, 2018). In essence, users online activities are recorded and the data goes through a series of algorithms to create an online profile of the user which then allows for data to be personalized for the users wants, needs and who the user is connected to on the social web Bozdag (2013). This raises the question of legitimacy and un-biasness of the algorithms in performing its’ roles and being a neutral mediator between users and data.

To address this we first need to understand what is meant by algorithms working as a gatekeeper between data and users. As noted by Smith(2001) *“gatekeeping theory addresses traditional media bias: how certain events are being treated more newsworthy than others and how institutions or influential individuals determine which information passes to the receivers (Smith et al. 2001)”* (Bozdag, 2013). With the recommendations of social media platforms and search engines, that influence what users see or do not see on social networking websites, in terms of commercial, knowledge, communication and political content, these mediators (social media sites & search engines) are becoming

the new era of gatekeepers of society. The role which was traditionally played by journalist, in deciding what was reported to society, suggests that, they play an integral role in maintaining a democratic society. The assumption that this process of filtration possess neutral and unbiased characteristics are far-fetched and inaccurate due to the role humans play in developing the design of algorithms and their influence during the operational processes of algorithms. This raises a very important question i.e. how does social media usage influence the decision making process of its' users based on their exposure towards information online in relation towards online shopping behaviours.

### 2.5.1 User Profile Personalization Process



*Diagram 1: User profiling process (Bozdag,2013)*

the type of profile of the user which is processed through a system. The profiles of users are created with general information such as, age, education levels, name, country , and in some instances will include the preferences and interest

of the a single user or a group of users. As shown in Diagram 1, which was presented by Bozdag (2013), the user profile process is the combination of three different phases, the Data Collection (that collects information of the users), Profile Constructor (that builds a profile of the user based on the information available from phase one) and the third phase is, the Technology or Application (where the generated user profile is then applied on different social media networking platforms, in order to personalise their search results, their news feeds, by recommending goods to consumers on online shops or through targeted advertising on social media)(Bozdag, 2013). As noticed in the profiling diagram 1 as presented by Bozdag (2013) – there are two ways in which a user profile can be created:

- (1) “Explicitly: the user customizes the information source himself. The user can register his interest or demographic information before the personalization starts. The user can also rate topics of interest.*
- (2) Implicitly: the system determines what the user is interested in through various factors, including web usage mining (i.e. previous interaction with the system such as clickthrough, browsing history, previous queries, time spend reading information about a product), IP address, cookies, session id’s etc. “*

(Bozdag, 2013).

This understanding allows us to draw the conclusion, that advertising that is targeted at users are not random, but are user specific, based on their online user profile. This allows market experts to utilise this information in the advertising process, where they are able to target advertisements towards consumers who are more likely to share an interest towards the product and who

would be more inclined to purchase one. It is important to understand if this process of targeted advertising is effective in obtaining sales via e-commerce sites (online shops). This study will allow us to reflect on the data obtained from the survey to analyse if these advertisements on social media platforms are capable in diverting users to their websites and completing a purchase.

## **2.6 Online Advertising**

### **2.6.1 History**

Advertising plays a huge role in contributing towards media organisations' revenue. As noted by (Bozdag, 2013) – *“traditional mass media is primarily supported by commercial sponsorship”* this does not imply that advertising no longer contributes towards the revenue of new mass media companies. Bozdag(2013) quotes that *“same pressure applies to online services; the majority of online service revenues comes from advertising (O'Dell 2011; Schroeder 2011; US Securities and Exchange Commission 2009)”* (Bozdag, 2013). This suggests that advertising plays an integral role in the financial economy of media communication platforms and websites. In-line with what has been covered above in (2.5.1 User Profile Personalization Process), this section covers a little on the history of online advertising, focusing on programmatic advertising as a whole but specifically discussing about targeted advertising.

The use of data to optimize advertising processes is no new notion in the realm of advertising. (McGuigan, 2019) highlights in his paper that during his research he found evidence that traced the use of *“data-driven, real-time audience buying to decades ago(Parikka,2012)”* (McGuigan, 2019). He showed that the use of algorithms was

present in the process *“to allocate expenditures; in hardware and software for circulation information about available inventory in trafficking and billing systems that coordinate orders, placement and payments; and in industry-wide effort to interconnect computer facilities”*(McGuigan, 2019). He classifies the term targeted advertising under a wider scope known as ‘programmatic advertising’, which he defines as *“techniques for automating and optimizing transactions in the audience marketplace”*(McGuigan, 2019). Targeted advertising is one of the components which falls under programmatic advertising. It should be noted that, *“programmatic advertising comprises more than 80% of online and mobile display advertising and nearly three quarters of digital video advertising in the United States (Fisher, 2018)”* (McGuigan, 2019). Advertising technology used in mediating the process of advertising planning has come a significant way since its’ beginnings’ and plays a significant role in orchestrating a smoothly functional programmatic advertising system. Understanding that, data collection and analysing is no new phenomenon in the realm of advertising is important to better understand that it has gone through a vigorous course to reach the peak of its’ game today. The element of targeted advertising will be put under the spotlight in the next section as it allows us to better study the effectiveness of advertising on social media networking platforms and the challenges it faces in being effective in the realm of online advertising.

### **2.6.2 Targeted Advertising**

Advertising online has become a huge factor in driving sales for companies regardless if they are, businesses in the virtual realm or in the physical brick and mortar form. Advertising plays an integral role for these business to promote or advertise their brand, product and their promotions in order to boost sales and increase revenue. With online advertising being the choice of many in the media age era we live in, this

study on targeted advertising is crucial for this study, as it allows us to understand the process of using user profiles in order to push messages (advertisements), which suit the characteristics of their 'user profile online'. Advertising too plays a huge role in maintaining the economy on the internet, funding a wide variety of websites and services (Guha, Cheng and Francis, 2010) – therefore increasing the importance to understand the fundamentals of one the key advertising techniques today. This raises the question among users and researches on the invasion of privacy on their information. (Guha, Cheng and Francis, 2010) conducted an experiment to find out the relationship between user profile information (on Facebook and Google ads), and the advertisements which users were exposed to. By controlling a few variables, they found that even though Google ads, 'behavioural targeting' is not significant, their use of location does affect it. On the contrary with Facebook, they found "location, user demographics and interests, and sexual-preferences all affect Facebook ads"(Guha, Cheng and Francis, 2010) – suggests that Facebook advertising utilises all of users profile information in targeting advertising. By acknowledging the use of targeted advertising on social media networking sites and the effectiveness of data usage of users online profiles to feed them with specific advertisements, this raises the question of how does this successfully relate to users online shopping habits? Does the time spent on social media networking platforms make users more vulnerable to targeted advertising that lead them to purchase from the advertisements? Does the Effects Theory proposed in the first section have any effect in terms of targeted advertising on social media networking sites? Does the time a user spends on social media networking sites, play any part towards their responses of targeted advertising? With this study, we intent to address the co-relation between users time spent on social

media platforms and towards their perception of targeted advertising on social media networking websites (e.g. Facebook and Instagram).



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Overview

With the study of this paper, the use of one method of research will be implied in the research process. The use of a quantitative research will be utilised in this study – this method of research as defined by Creswell (1994) who states that it is “explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)”(Sukamolson, no date).

The primary objective of this paper is to identify the relationship between users online social media networking habits, in relation to their online shopping behaviours. Trying to determine if users’ social media networking consumptions had an influence towards their online shopping behaviours will allow for future expletory research and studies in the field, by being able to utilise the findings of this paper. The secondary objective of this paper was to identify if targeted advertising on social media is effective in influencing social media users. Essentially this study is aimed to identify if a user who spends more hours on social media networking websites, was more likely to shop online. The secondary objective is to test the effectiveness of targeted advertising on social media platforms (online advertising) – in relation with the shopping behaviours of social media users.

As quoted by Cooper et al. (1994) *“this study categorized the following methods that used empirical procedures in gathering or analysing data as quantitative research: survey, content analysis, experiment and empirical secondary data analysis”*(Kim and Weaver, 2002). The quantitative research involved conducting research on the proposed topic, in order to identify a gap with existing research and a survey. The

content analysis of the research conducted, allowed for the examination of the research areas which have already been conducted in the studies of this field. In addition to that, a survey was created and distributed on different social media networking platforms which were appropriate for this study. This was designed to obtain data, which would be relevant to the study to identify the relationship between online social media networking usage of users, towards their online shopping behaviours.

The research methods chosen is the integral part of this study, in order to give an accurate and well represented analysis and understanding of the study. It will allow future researchers to review the data obtained in this study, to help them examine different elements of the field which have yet to be studied. In addition to that, it will allow them to reference this study in future literature in order to identify or help support their studies; where relevant. This study hopes to establish a better understanding of the relationship between the two main elements of this study, which are time spent on social media and the influence it has on social media networking users' shopping behaviours. In this section of the paper, we will go over the reasoning for each of the research decisions made in relation to the choices of the research methods used. In addition to that, we will discuss the reasoning why the methods used were chosen over other research methods available and the weight it carries in conducting a precise study on the proposed elements. We will then discuss the characteristics of the sample which were set in place for the research methods allocated. The rationale behind the selected sample area which will also shed light on challenges faced with the chosen sample. In the next part, we will discuss the research instrument which was used for the creation of the survey and the social media platforms which the survey was

distributed on to receive the responses we needed. Last but not least, we will cover the ethical issues faced with the research method chosen, together with the challenges faced while dealing with the research method of choice for this study.

### **3.2 Quantitative Research**

(Creswell, 2013) suggests that *“examining the relationships between and among variables is central to answering questions and hypotheses through survey and experiments. The reduction to a parsimonious set of variables, tightly controlled through design or statistical analysis, provides measures or observations for testing a theory. Objective data result from empirical observations and measures. Validity and reliability of scores on instruments lead to meaningful interpretations of data”* (Creswell, 2013). This method was the main basis of obtaining data for this study as it allows for the retrieval of data to matters which naturally do not have any numerical or quantifiable figures. The following sub-topics will discuss briefly how the use of quantitative research, has allowed the creation of data to matters of no numerical attributes attached to it, for example, an individual’s personal attitude, behaviour of beliefs. We focused particularly on using a survey to achieve the data required for this research i.e. to the attempt of establishing a relationship between individuals attitude and technology. Though on paper, conducting a survey seemed like the perfect choice of research method to choose, it had its’ own shortcomings in relation to this study. We will address the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative survey research in the next section.

### 3.2.1 Quantitative Research (Survey)

Quantitative research is a commonly used method of research when *“testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables”*(Creswell, 2013). This form of research is very well suited to this study in this paper, where we propose to study the relationship between the consumption of an individual's social media networking habits (hours spent on social media networking sites), and the influence it has on his/hers' online shopping behaviours. In the paper written by (Sukamolson, no date), on the fundamentals of Quantitative Research he quotes Creswell's (1994) definition of quantitative research – *“explaining a phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics”*. By analysing the breakdown of the definition presented by Sukamolson, we observe that quantitative research was the most appropriate method to use for this study. He breaks the definition down into three elements:

1) *Explaining phenomena*

- *“When a research is set in place, its' objective is to explain something (phenomena)”*

2) *Collection of numerical data*

- *“In order to use mathematically-based methods, there needs to be numerical data present in order to conduct the analysis”*

3) *Use of mathematically based methods (particularly statistics)*

- *“The usage of mathematically based methods, to analyse data (statistics in particular)”*

(Sukamolson, no date)

Within the framework of this study, we have explained the phenomena (literature review), we required the collection of data (quantitative research survey) and will use mathematically based methods to present our findings. Hence the use of quantitative research survey for this study. The use of survey researching requires questionnaire design and scientific sampling in order to measure, to, precision the characteristics or behaviour of the population i.e. 'How many users feels a certain way?' or 'How many users act a certain way?'. In allowing for a differentiation to be made between different groups, it enables researchers to make observations of the population, to a certain scale.

The survey contains 10 questions that was designed to allow for the study to establish if a relationship between time spent on social media networking websites, had any influence on users online shopping habits. The survey was not intended to study the cumulative user social media consumption hours but their daily consumption. There were several open ended questions and there were several which were in the form of rating on a scale (frequency – i.e. always, usually, sometimes, rarely, and never). The scale rating was to help identify and understand the occurrence of online purchasing habits and the frequency that an individual is exposed to targeted marketing on social media networking websites. As noted by (Sukamolson, no date), *"many data that do not naturally appear in quantitative form can be collected in quantitative form. We do this by designing research instruments aimed specifically at converting phenomena that don't naturally exist in quantitative form into quantitative data"* (Sukamolson, no date). By doing so, we are able to conduct the study of beliefs, behaviours and attitudes which do not hold any numerical data, therefore restricting our ability to conduct statistical analysis that allow for an accurate findings/conclusion.

*“Research seeks to develop relevant, true statements, ones that can serve to explain the situation of concern or that describe the causal relationships of interest. In quantitative studies, researchers advance the relationship among variables and pose his in terms of question or hypotheses”* (Phillips, Phillips and Burbules, 2000). Making it extremely crucial that the questions presented in the survey are able to address the topic of concern in this study. The questions represented in the survey acted as the representative of the data that needed to be obtained to help discuss the study in questions.

The survey questions are as shown in the images below :

## Online Shopping - Social Media

1. How old are you?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65+

2. How many hours a day would you spend on social media?

- ☐ 1-2
- ☐ 2-4
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. Do you shop online?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other (please specify)

4. How often do you shop online?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

5. If you do not shop online, why not?

6. How often do you click on advertisements you come across on social media?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Usually
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

7. Do you ever purchase from pop-up advertisements on social media?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. Do you prefer shopping online?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ If no, why?

9. What do you usually shop for online?

10. Do you think online shopping will completely replace traditional shopping?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



Survey questions :-

1. How old are you?
2. How many hours a day would you spend on social media?
3. Do you shop online?
4. How often do you shop online?
5. If you do not shop online, why not?
6. How often do you click on advertisements you come across on social media?
7. Do you ever purchase from pop up advertisements on social media?
8. Do you prefer shopping online?
9. What do you usually shop for online?
10. Do you think online shopping will completely replace traditional shopping?

Questions 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,10, were designed to obtain numerical data from the responses. Question 1. was set in place to get a rough indication of the age group of our survey respondents. Question 2. allowed us to get an idea of how many hours a day our respondents spent on social media networking websites. Question 3,7,8,10 – were simple Yes or No questions, which would allow for the establishment of relationships between the main variable of the study. Question 4 & 6 are scaled questions which allow for observation the frequency of the action conducted by the respondent. Question 5 & 9 are open ended questions which allow for the observants to replying accordingly, this additional information in the survey would allow for the indication of other influences available.

### 3.2.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

The usage of quantitative research in this study possesses its' own set of advantages and disadvantages, where the advantages of using this method outweigh the disadvantages and the disadvantages did not have a direct influence on the results of the study. The first benefit observed was that it consumed less time as mentioned by (Connolly, 2007) with available statistical software's available to researchers, this allows for the minimal usage of time. By being able to create our survey on one of these software's' (online websites), we were able to let the survey run without having to constantly monitor the results. In addition to that, the findings obtained from quantitative surveying as quoted by (Carr, 1994) , states that the use of this method allows for the generalisation of a whole or sub population because it involves a wider sample which has been randomly chosen and not constrained. This method, also, allows for the formulation of statistically accurate analysis without the emotional influence on the design factor. Lastly, the use of quantitative research allows for the accurate examination of multiple different data-sets and hypothesis at any given time and permits the usage of larger samples in that allows us to draw conclusions which are generalizable.

Given the pros mentioned above, quantitative research has its' disadvantages too – as quoted by (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998) noted *“the positivism research paradigm leaves out the common meanings of social phenomenon”* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998) and it does not go deeper to understand the reasoning behind it. Therefore, the method is vulnerable, to a certain extent, to being influenced by external factors that cannot be understood in depth through the practice of this method. Though, it does not directly affect the accuracy of our study, it possess the ability to influence the

responses to some degree which is beyond our knowledge, making this an unidentifiable factor of in our study. The next disadvantage of quantitative research is the format of gaining an overall reading or measurement of the phenomenon: as discussed by Schofield, *"it measures variable at a specific moment in time, and disregard whether the photograph happened to catch one looking one's best or looking unusually disarranged"* (Schofield, 2007) . With regards to this study, we are able to observe the data which represents the co-relation between the users of social media consumption and their online shopping habits. However, due to the nature of quantitative research we are unable to conduct exploratory research in order to identify other influencing factors in an individuals' decisions and choices.

Another challenge with the use of this format of research, is that *"the positivism cannot account for how the social reality is shaped and maintained, or how people interpret their actions and others (Blaikie, 2007)"* (Rahman, 2016). Based on the data we obtain, we will be able to create relationships between the cause and influence between two variables but we will be restricted to that paradigm. The data would not allow for any deeper study, within the context of this study, to identify the influence acting on shaping social reality, or how individuals interpret their actions based on external forces. Last but not least, *"the quantitative research paradigm overlooks the respondents' experiences and perspectives in highly controlled settings (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2013)"* (Rahman, 2016). The argument surrounding this disadvantage, is based on the lack of interaction between researches and respondents during the data collection process, therefore the data collection method becomes objective.

Although there are several disadvantages to the use of quantitative research, the ability of this method to obtain numerical data from actions, influence and subjects without numerical valuation, is an integral part of this study. This will allow us to conduct the study, in order to identify the relationship between time spent on social media platforms, in relation with an users online shopping behaviour. In addition to that, due to the minimal time and ease of using this research method that has the ability to create sound hypotheses from the data obtained, quantitative research was the best suited method for this study.

### **3.2.3 Distribution Platforms**

The platforms chosen for the distribution of our survey were Facebook and Instagram, owned by Facebook, as they are two of the largest social media networking sites available today. This year alone, Facebook had reported a total of 15.08 billion U.S. dollars in revenue (1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2019) (*Clement*, 2019) and Instagram reported a total of 14 billion U.S. dollars in revenue (1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2019) (*Clement*, 2019). It was reported that, the majority of the company's revenue was from advertising alone. These platforms were deemed fit to be our platform of distribution due to the nature of the study which has social media networking usage as one of the main variables of the study. By distributing the survey on these social media networking platforms, we were able to achieve a 100% success rate on distributing the survey to users who are moderately/vigorously active on social media platforms. Another factor which influenced the choice of distribution was the convenience of being able to receive respondents without being constrained to any time-zone or geographical factors. This allowed for a much wider distribution of the survey, were able. We were then able to achieve higher number of responses in a timely manner, compared to the traditional

questionnaire that participants would have to print out and answer the questions. Lastly, the user friendly interface available on both of the chosen platforms, eased the sharing of the survey as users could share our survey on their profiles which allowed us to reach their friends or followers.

#### **3.2.4 Research Tools**

In order to conduct this research, we had to identify an online platform which allowed us to create an online survey, which also allowed ease of sharing the survey to different social media platforms. In addition to that, the ease of collecting and analysing the data played an integral role when identifying the right research tool for this research. SurveyMonkey was the chosen tool for the job, with the ability to store the data on their website and the statistical tools available to its' users. It allowed for an effortless process of obtaining and analysing data from the survey. SurveyMonkey also allowed for the implementation of specific rules and filters in the final stage of analysing your data. This allows the researcher to change the variables that correspond with the question and to observe the relationship between the two different variables i.e. the identification of the relationship between users social media usages and their online shopping behaviours. SurveyMonkey had built in calculators in their interface which allowed for the calculations of our margin of errors and sample size needed to obtain an accurate representation of the population size.

#### **3.2.5 Sampling and target audience**

Sample size, is a crucial element in conducting a successful survey as the information gathered from survey is used to create a generalisation of a conclusion that would be noted from the findings. The design of surveys are usually with the intention of

collecting data that would be used to represent a population (Bartlett, Kotrlik and Higgins, 2001). To ensure an efficient representation of a population, a fixed sample size needed to be identified and put in place. It is a two-step-calculation that led us to our sample size. The first step was to identify our margin of error using the formula:

$$\text{Margin of error} = z \times \frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}$$

**n** = sample size • **σ** = population standard deviation • **z** = z-score

*Equation 1: Margin of Error Formula (SurveyMonkey,2019)*

This gave us a score of 8%. The next step of the process was to determine our sample size by using the formula provided below:

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{\frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left( \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2 N} \right)}$$

**N** = population size • **e** = Margin of error (percentage in decimal form) • **z** = z-score

*Equation 2: Sample Size Formula (SurveyMonkey,2019)*

We determined that a sample size of 261 was needed for this study to create a close to accurate representation of the targeted population intended to study. To conduct this two-step-calculation process, we used the calculation tools that was provided to by SurveyMonkey. Once the sample size was determined, we designed the survey and begun distribution on two social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram).

The platforms chosen for the distribution of the survey was based on the determined target audience. As the nature of the was identify the relationship between the time

spent online by a user in relation to their shopping habits, we therefore set our target audience as social media platforms users. This allowed for a much more effective collection of data, as anyone who came across the survey must have been active on one social media platform or another. Not specifying any particular age group was another element of the targeted group, because social media platforms are used by individuals of different age groups, hence we found that the age group did not play a significant role in our study.

### **3.3 Definition of Research Problem**

The aforementioned idea was proposed based on the demand for expanded research based on what has already been conducted. Internet studies, has become a growing field of study due to the technological expansions that have helped fuel the growth of internet use in societies everyday life. Some of the prominent literature in this field has already covered the major aspects of internet studies, such as, users behavioural changes, the impact of technology/internet on society, the social shaping capabilities of technology and etc. With the technological and networking advancements, online shopping has become a growing economical field in society as it contributes highly to the global economy. Hence, this is one of the main elements of our study. The second element of our study is, social media platforms i.e. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and etc. Although, we focussed on Facebook, it is an astonishing phenomenon of how social media networking has not only influenced the way society communicates but also how they consume media, and this has transformed the manner in which advertising is conducted today. With respect to advertising, the original roots and foundations of advertising are still intact but the medium and methods of advertising

has changed driven by the evolution of social media networking platforms (social online realm).

With over 2.7 billion users on social media platforms (Clement, *Number of social media users worldwide 2010-2021*, 2019), which makes up of 30% of the world population(7.5billion people globally) (2019 *World Population by Country*, 2019) – it is an important study for any individual or researcher who is involved in the media, advertising or marketing field to acknowledge whether there is/isn't a relationship between these two elements of the study. Hence we identified, that it would be of interest to us and many to study the relationship between the time a user spends on social media networking sites and the relation to their online shopping habits. That being the primary objective of this paper, we further identified that we were able to include a secondary objective without having to do a full separate survey on it. We proposed the study of the effectiveness of targeted advertising on social media users.

By using quantitative research methods, we were able to identify if there is a real relationship between a social media users daily online media consumption in relation to their online shopping behaviours. We carried out a survey with a sample size of 261 people which represented the 2.7 billion active social media users, with a margin of error of 8%. We conducted our survey on a platform named SurveyMonkey, which helped us throughout the research process from identifying and calculating our sample size our sample area and margin of errors percentage, the distribution of our survey and the data collection and analysing of the data. In the next chapter of this paper, we will reflect on the data obtained through this research and identify if there is a



relationship present between the two factors, and how this can benefit managers, practitioners and researchers of this field.

### **3.4 Collection & Analysing data**

As mentioned above, by utilising the tools available we were able to manage the collection and analysis of data process internally. The collection and analysing of the data was split into a 3 step process to answer the primary objective and the secondary objective of this study. Once we reached our goal of 261 respondents to fulfil our sample size, we closed the survey to begin the collection and analysing of our data. In SurveyMonkey, we created 3 unique filters that helped us to create a comparison of one question against another. This helped us to change the variables and note the responses in relation to the variable change. The fixed variable in each of this filter was 'how many hours a day would you spend on social media' – this question in the survey represented the time (t). The second variable which is not constant is 'how often do you click on advertisements you come across on social media' – this question represents targeted advertising effectiveness on redirecting users which will be represented by (x). The last variable is the question of 'do you ever purchase from pop-up advertisements on social media' – this represents the effectiveness of pop-up advertisements in influencing users shopping behaviours which will be represented by (y).

- 1) Time = (t)
- 2) Effectiveness of advertising on social media to redirect users = (x)
- 3) Effectiveness of advertising in influencing users shopping behaviours (y)

Three filters were created with the constant variable (t). We ran this filter three different times and collected the data, each time applying a different variable either (x) or (y). The results were then collected and analysed. We then created graphs to represent the findings of each variable, in order to address and answer the research questions proposed:

**RQ1: How does the consumption of social media influence a user's online purchasing habits?**

**RQ2: How effective is targeted advertising in redirecting users?**

**RQ3: Does the prolonged exposure to media advertisements influence user's purchasing habits?**

The results of this finding will be discussed in Chapter 4, where we will analyze the findings and discuss whether there is a co-relation between the time spent on social media, in relation towards social medias users' online shopping behavior.

### **3.5 Ethical Issues**

With conducting quantitative research, there is a likelihood that ethical issues may arise, whether it is direct or indirect. During our research process we did not face any of that issues. But during the planning and designing face of this research, the collection of data and the analysing of data, we had to ensure that the possible ethical issues which could arise did not. We will begin to highlight the potential ethical issues that we faced during the planning and designing phase of this research and how we dealt with it – the first biggest challenge was remaining neutral. Being the researcher of this study, we had the control over the whole design process of the study, therefore allowing our natural beliefs, influences and emotions to get in the way of the of the

design process. Allowing these factors to influence the design process could potentially lead to a relatively biased research and the collection of data would not be as accurate in its' representation of the population of study. Ensuring that the design process was not tampered by these influences we made sure that we were in the right headspace when working on the research. Moving on, we had to make sure that, the questions in our survey was as neutral as possible, without leaving any indications or influence of how the respondents should respond, therefore creating a questionnaire with mostly range scaled questions, whereby the users would pick from a list of responses. These responses and question represented the variables in the research.

Next, we had to ensure that we had a fair distribution of the survey was conducted and that the survey was not distributed to any specific groups who would be able to potentially sway the direction the outcome. By sharing the survey on social media platform, we were able to obtain a random sample group, who had no affiliations towards the study, therefore making them neutral participants. Participants too shared the survey with their fellows peers on social media networking platforms, allowing us to maintain an almost 'non-present researcher role' in the research process, therefore reducing the amount of influences possible, which could have affected the data obtained.

With the breach of user information and privacy being a huge topic in relation to social media, we ensured that we did our best to avoid being tangled in any situations related to this. Designing the survey in the manner which did not require respondents to provide us with personal information. Due to the nature of the study, whereby the researchers (us), only required numerical data (represented by respondents replies)

allowed us to completely avoid the need for any personal information (i.e. name, email, email address and etc) from the participants. That being said, it needs to be noted that, we did include a question which asked for the participants age, which has of no significance in terms of personal information breach as the participant is still anonymous in the data we retrieve after closing of the survey.

Last but not least, the collection and analysing of the data too presents itself with potential ethical issue. One may argue, that the data could be manipulated by the research during this process. With the data being the core of this study, to help us answer our research questions, it is important that the processing and presentation of the data is as transparent as possible. Therefore, eliminating the room for any form of manipulation being implied towards the data that has been obtained. In addition to that, in order to ensure that the data that represents the studied population accurately and that due diligence is invested in the study in order to ensure the accurate data presentation we will include the extracts from the survey conducted in the end of the paper, in order to maintain a high level of transparency.

### **3.6 Challenges**

Most of the possible challenges that we faced have already been highlighted in the section on ethical issues. That being said, there are a few more general challenges which deserve attention, first of all determining the angle of study. With multiple different studies in the field of internet studies, Media Communication and advertising in the modern age, there were not many recent studies, that were available in terms of relevance towards the proposed study of this paper. Therefore, finding relevant literature which backed up / supported our study was a bit of a challenge for the

literature review. The second challenge we faced was the tabulation of the data into graphs in order to present in our findings. Though not a big challenge, it took a significant amount of time to create the graphs in order to highlight the findings to show if there is a relationship between the variables. Therefore, time became a factor – even though we had assistance from the tools available to us from SurveyMonkey, the online platform we used for conducting our quantitative research (survey). Lastly, reaching the targeted sample size for the survey, even though 261 is not a huge sample size to achieve, was still a challenge, with people's busy lives. It was an obstacle to get them to divert their attention of social media networking platforms i.e. Facebook and Instagram, to complete the survey – hence why we designed the survey in an easy and efficient manner which did not consume a lot of time to complete. This allowed respondents to complete the survey in, minimal time. Taking into account that the survey was short, we made sure that the questions were relevant to our study and were able to provide us with the information that we required to complete this study as efficiently and as accurately as possible.

## **Chapter 4: Findings and Results**

### **4.1. Overview**

In this chapter we will solely be looking at graphs and discussing the findings. The graphs will be based on the data that had been obtained from a survey with a sample size of 261 respondents. Each graph represents a different variable and the data represents the relationship between that variable and the fixed variable. In order to answer the research questions in this paper, the analysis of the data would be broken down into three parts in this chapter based on the variables, as shown below:

- 1) Time = (t)
- 2) Effectiveness of advertising on social media to redirect users = (x)
- 3) Effectiveness of advertising in influencing users shopping behaviours (y)

We will then discuss if there was a noticeable relationship between time spent on social media platforms in relation to users shopping behaviours, based on the data provided. We will be able to come to a conclusion if the effects theory as mentioned about in chapter 1, does exist in this new age of media and communications. In addition to that, we will identify the effectiveness of targeted marketing and if it has the capabilities of redirecting users from social media to their websites, which could potentially lead to an online commerce transaction to occur.

### **4.2 Analysis of survey**

With each research question being tested, there was one constant variable, which was the time a user (survey participant) spent on social media. Allowing for the study of the impact of pro-longed exposure towards social media and its' influence on the users shopping behaviour. This analysis, as mentioned, is broken down into three parts and we will analyse the overall response. Looking at the percentage of people who shop

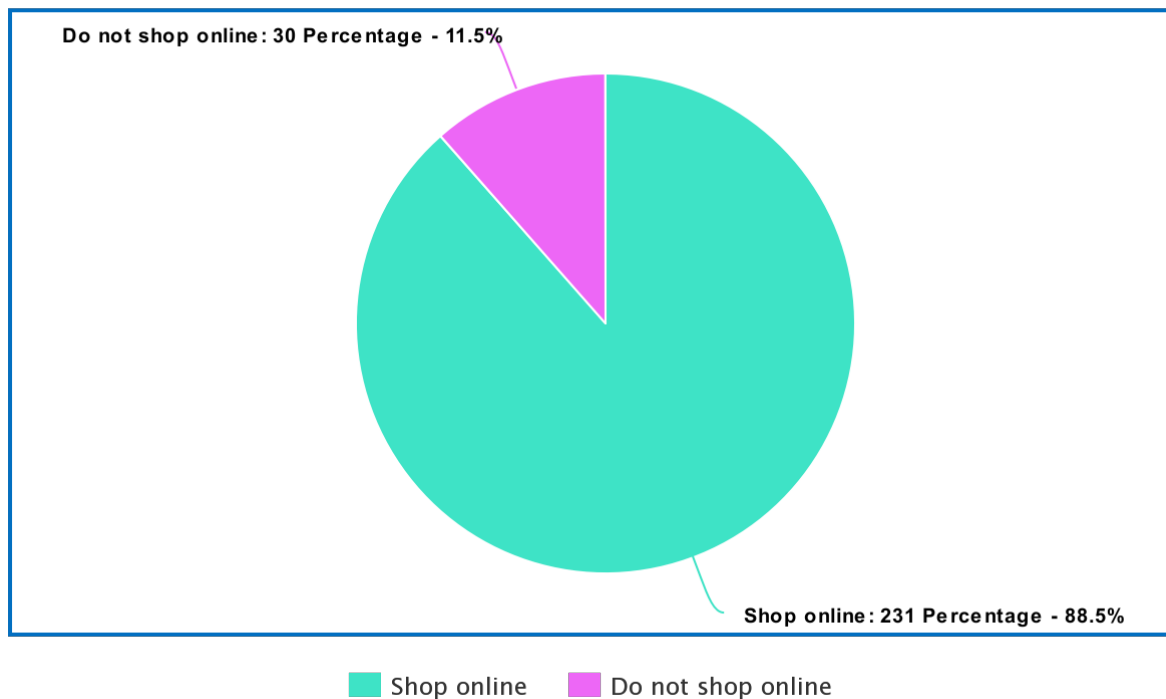
online versus those who do not, allowing for an indication of the participants shopping habits, before focusing on the time they spend on social media in relation to their shopping habits.

The second part we will look if users (participants), click on online advertisements that they come across on social media platforms. In a similar manner, we will look at the percentage of the overall participants, in order to gauge whether the majority are likely to click on advertisements online. We will then break it down into more detail, to determine the frequency they are to do so based on their daily social media consumption. This will allow for the analysis if targeted advertising is effective in redirecting users, and if time spent online plays a role in this influence.

Last but not least, we will be looking at users (participants), purchasing behaviours from online advertisements. Looking at the overall percentage of users (participants) who do purchase from online advertisements. Moving deeper, we will look at this in relation to the time the user spends on social media daily and identify if there is a relationship between the two factors. This will allow for the analysis if online advertising is successful in pursuing a user (participant) to shop online, and if time spent online plays a role in this influence.

### 4.2.1 Variable 1

Participants who shop online VS those who do not shop online (Survey of 261 participants)

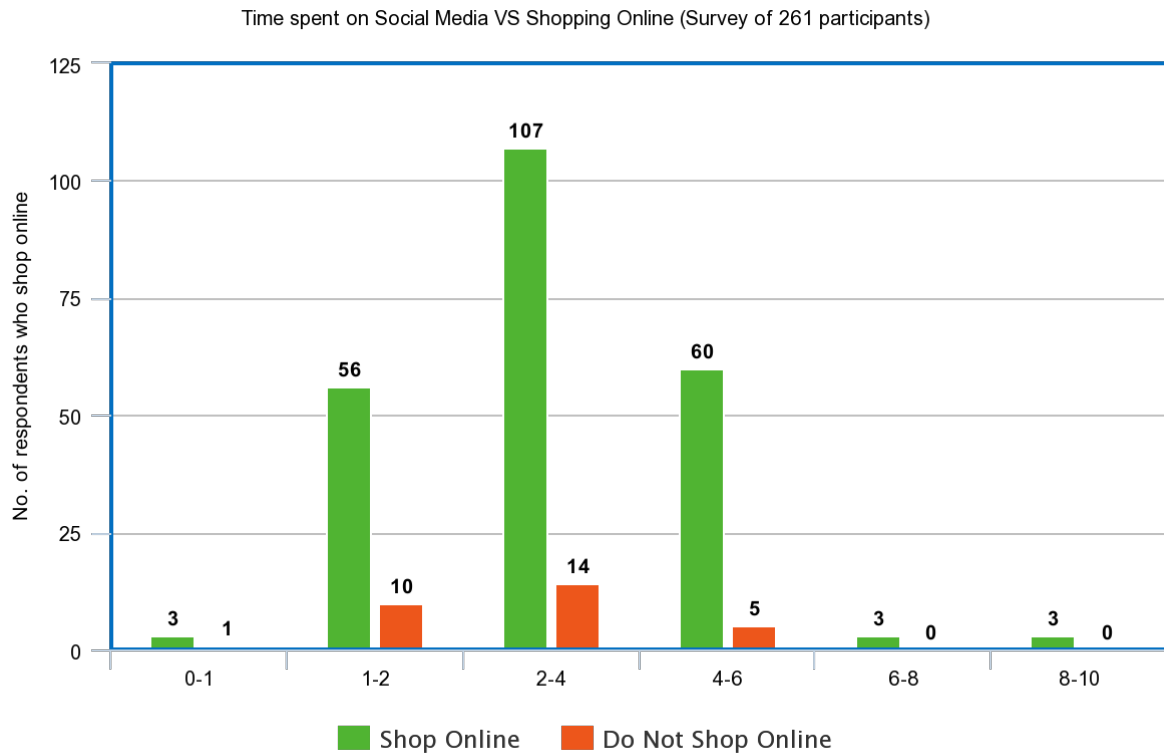


meta-chart.com

*Chart 2: Participants who shop online VS those who do not shop online (Survey of 261 participants)*

From the above chart, we can observe that out of the 261 responses we received, that 88.5% (231 participants), shop online and that only 11.5% (30 participants), do not shop online. Which allows us to conclude that the wide majority of our sample (participants), do shop online. Now that a baseline has been drawn, we will take a look at these results in relation to the users daily time spent on social media platforms. Chart 3 & Diagram 1 below, highlights these results. Chart 3 allows us to observe the data, in the form of the chart, showing the number of people who shop online in comparison to those. Diagram 1, represents the data in the form of percentage which allows for a better discussion of the data.





meta-chart.com

Chart 3: Time spent on Social Media VS Shopping Online (Survey of 261 participants)

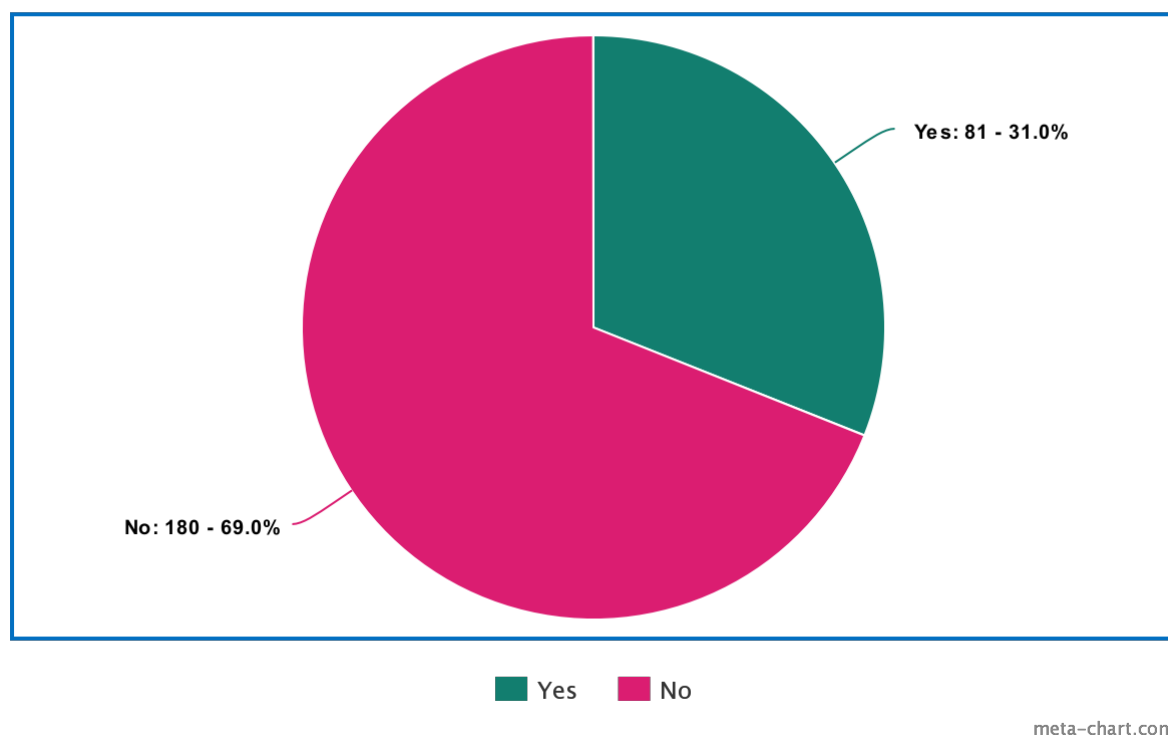
Hours spent online	Shop Online (%)	Do Not Shop Online (%)	Overall Percentage (%)
0-1	75%	25%	1.15%
1-2	84.85%	15.15%	25.29%
2-4	88.43%	11.57%	46.36%
4-6	92.31%	7.69%	24.9%
6-8	100%	0%	1.15%
8-10	100%	0%	1.15%

Table 1: Time spent on Social Media VS Shopping Online (%) (Survey of 261 participants)

The table above represent the percentage of users who shop online VS those who do not shop online. The percentage was calculated from the overall respondents for the particular group (time spent online). What we observed was that majority of the respondents, do shop online. With just over 88.5% of participants shopping online, it is clear that online shopping has gained popularity in the era we live in. Based on Diagram1 – we can note that, time spent on social media does not play a factor to influence online users shopping behaviour. Based on the data provided, each group (time spent on social media) – had a minimum of 75% or above correspondent towards

shopping online in comparison to those who do not shop online, which allows us to determine that the time spent on social media, does not influence users shopping behaviours online. On the contrary, it allows for the observation that shopping online has become the norm in society and the preferred choice of shopping. The findings of this raises the question of, will online shopping complete replace traditional shopping? With more than 88.5% of participants shopping online, we asked them their thoughts on this lingering ideology that online shopping would replace traditional shopping.

Online Shopping the future of commercial transactions (Survey of 261 participants)



meta-chart.com

*Chart 4: Online Shopping the future of Commercial Transactions (Survey of 261 participants)*

We found that 69% of the participants believed that online shopping with not be able to replace traditional shopping. In comparison to 31% who believe that online shopping is the future of commercial transactions (i.e. online shopping, trading and etc). If time spent on social media played a role in users online shopping behaviours, we would have notice a gradual increment in number of users who shop online, as opposed to

the data obtained. Which suggest that, regardless of time, majority of the users do shop online.

#### **4.2.2 Variable 2**

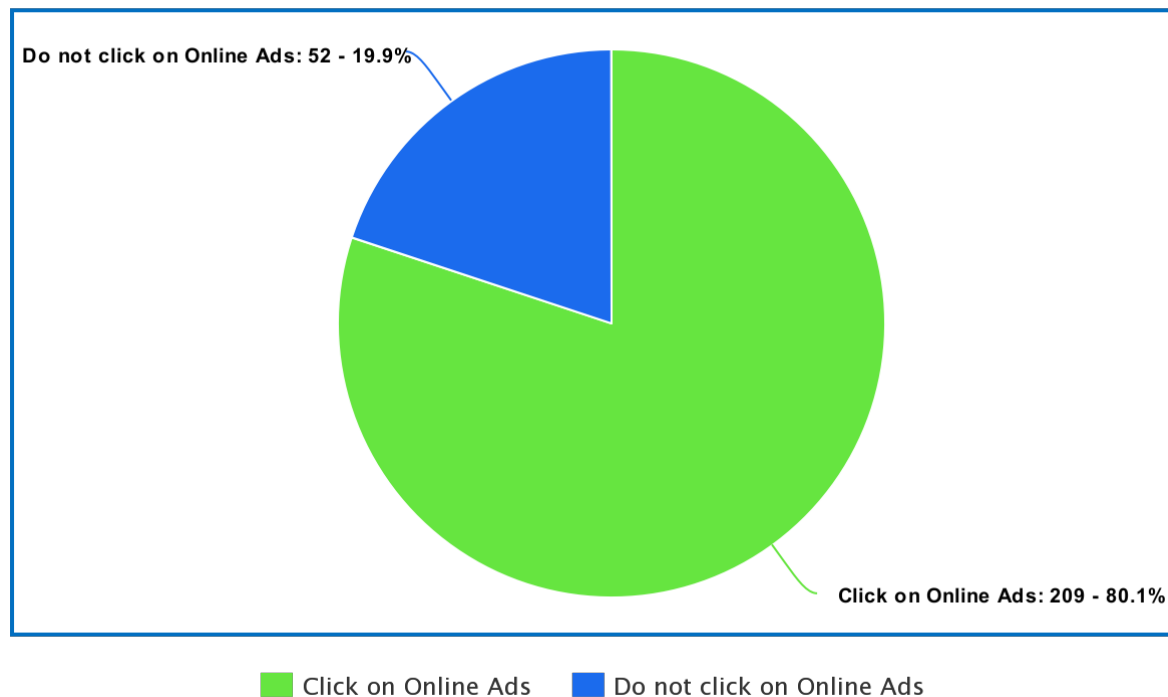
Since we have identified that time spent on social media platforms does not play a huge role in users shopping habits online, we move on to analyse the data on the effectiveness of advertising on social media to redirect users.

*“Targeted online advertising refers to any form of online advertising that is based on information that advertisers has about the advertising recipient, such as demographics, current or past browsing or purchase behaviour information from preference survey, and geographic information” (Schumann, von Wangenheim and Groene, 2014, p. 59).*

With its' growing popularity, targeted advertising has been classified as a major marketing trend, I the field of marketing and advertising (*Hallerman, 2010*). With Facebook and Instagram being our social media plat form of study, this is highly relative to our study as both these platforms allow its' advertisers to fully utilise their built in targeted advertising features. These features allows for advertisers to choose certain demographics , age group and location of the intended target audience. But this raises the question of how effective are these advertisements in redirecting users to off the platform to the advertisers websites (online shops)? In this section of data analysis we will be exploring that question. We asked 261 participants the likelihood of them clicking on online advertisements, the data was then explored with relation to the fixed variable (how long a responded spends on social media a day vs the

frequency of them clicking on online advertisements).

Participants who click on Online Advertisements VS those who do not (Survey of 261 participants)



meta-chart.com

*Chart 5: No. of participants who click on online advertisements (Survey of 261 participants)*

In the chart above, we can see an average of 80.1% out of 261 participants do click on online advertisements in comparison to 19.9% who do not. From this we can note that, targeted advertising is effective in getting users to click on their advertisements, but at what frequency does this occur at? The percentage above, is just an overall accumulation of data of participants who said they did click on adverts online. The chart below, gives a more in depth look at the frequency of this occurrences, by looking at the frequency in relation to the time spent online, we will be able to gauge if there is an absolute level of effectiveness of targeted advertising on social media networking platforms.

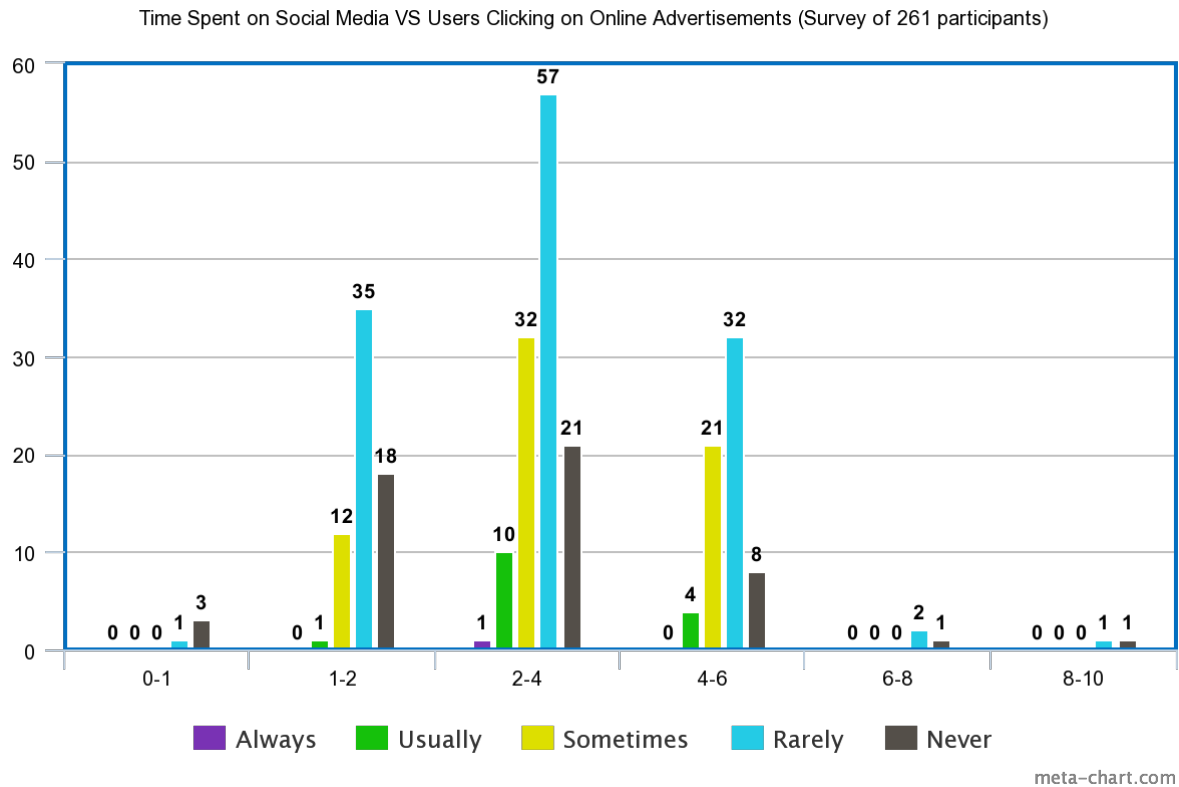


Chart 6: Time Spent on Social Media VS Users Clicking on Online Advertisements (Survey of 261 participants)

From the chart we can see that the efficiency of targeted advertising in obtaining reoccurring clicks are not as effective, with 'rarely' getting the highest amount of votes and 'always' getting the lowest, we note that it is not as effective, even though 80.1% do click on advertisements on social media platforms (Instagram & Facebook). The table below shows the percentage of reoccurrence level based on the number of respondents gained towards each response available, based on the scaled range provided in the survey.

Frequency	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Always	1	0.38%
Usually	15	5.75%
Sometime	65	24.9%
Rarely	128	49.04%
Never	52	19.92%

Table 2: Reoccurrence percentage , based on participants responses(Survey of 261 participants)

From this study, we can draw attention to the effectiveness of online advertising on social media platform (Facebook & Instagram), are not as capable to achieve a high

frequency of clicks. Yes, the data does reflect on 80.1% of users clicking on advertisements on social media, but the frequency of that to happen is rare. Based on the data acquired, it is imperative to note, regardless of the time users spend on social media networking websites, they are not easily persuaded to click on online advertisements, therefore suggesting that online advertisement even though effective in gaining clicks are more likely not able to achieve a higher frequency of clicks from the same user. We can draw an assumption that the clicks achieved from online advertising are usually new users, or users who are interested in 'that particular product', or the product is from a particular brand which is reputable. We can conclude that, users are not likely to click on the advertisement they come across on social media, unless the advertisement is appealing to them, even though most of the advertisements that they come across are 'targeted advertising' and are meant to reach them. We can draw a soft conclusion that the ability of online advertising (targeted advertising in particular), does not possess the maximum capability to redirecting users of social media networking platform, unless it is of interest or beneficial towards the users. Hence making this form of advertising not as effective as it is.

#### **4.2.3 Variable 3**

The final presentation of data will be reflection of the data which has been treated above in 4.2.2 Variable 2. Allowing us to draw the relationship between online advertising and users purchasing from said advertising. Earlier we discussed the effectiveness of online advertising in redirecting users towards the advertisers websites (online shops). The third variable, will allow us to understand the effectiveness of that redirection towards the advertisers website, we will analyse how

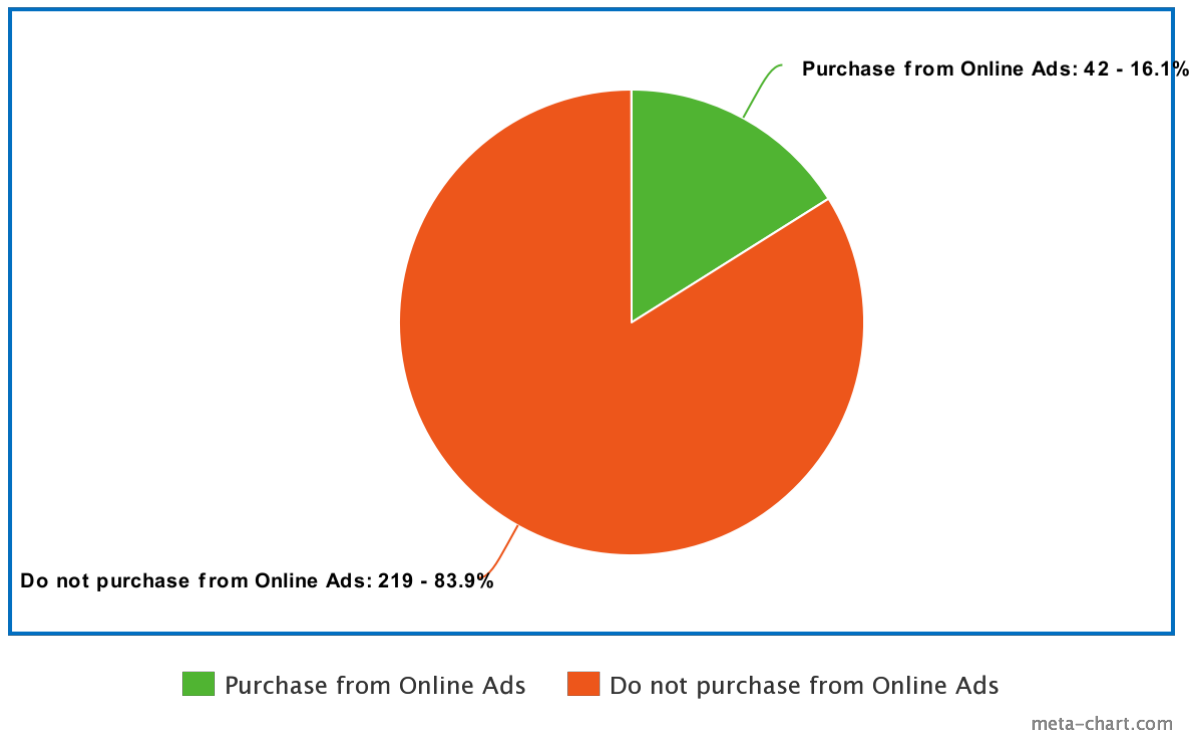
many people out of 261 participants who actually purchase from advertisements that they come across on social media (Facebook & Instagram). From that we will analyse, does the time a user spends on social media show any relationship *between their decisions to purchase from said advertisements that they come across*.

*“The positive relationship between cumulative social network usage and online shopping activity is stronger for product categories that tend to be shared on social network and/or are often bought as unplanned purchases” (Zhang et al., 2017).*

As proposed by (Zhang et al., 2017), products which are shared on social media are more likely to receive purchases. In our study, we would like to understand if advertisements which are constantly ‘spammed’ on social media platforms are to receive the same treatment and are able to pursued users to purchase from online advertising ‘targeted advertising’.

From the data we have obtained 83.9% (219) – do not purchase from online adverts in comparison to the 16.1% (42) who do purchase from online advertisements. Refer to the chart below

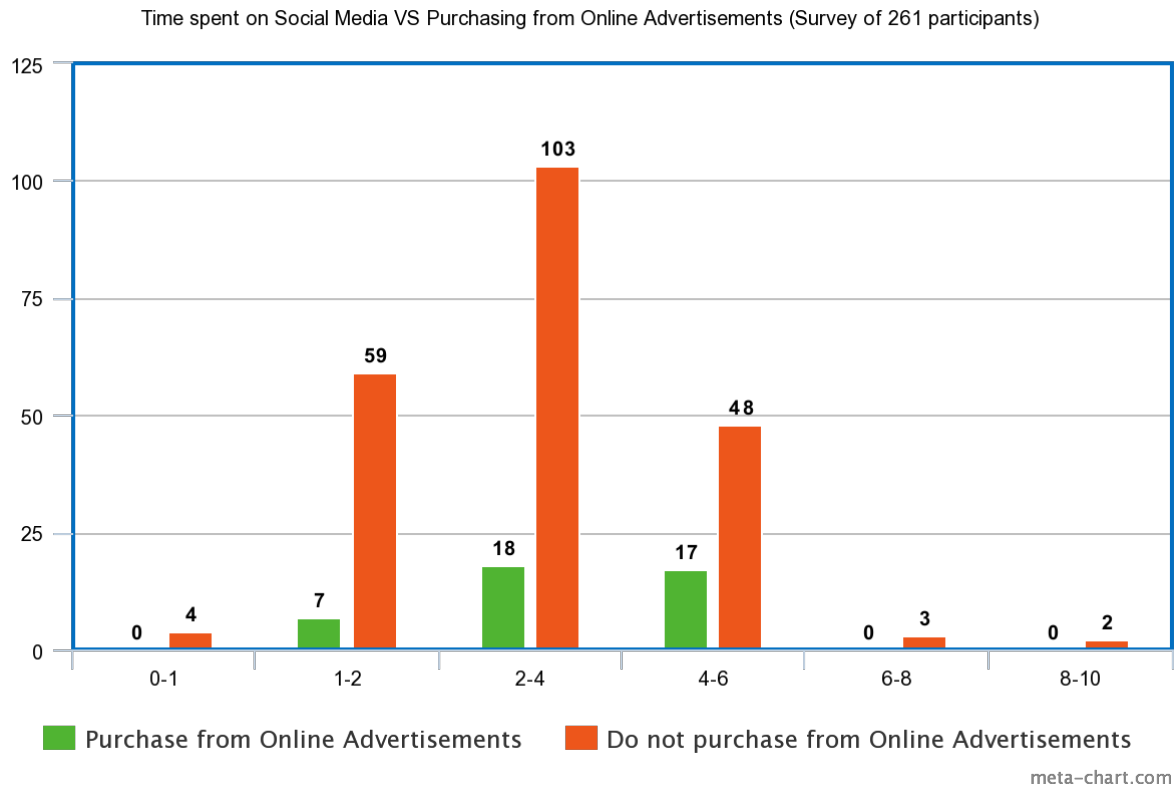
Purchase from Online Advertisements VS do not purchase from Online Advertisements (Survey of 261 participants)



*Chart 7: Purchasing behaviour from Online Advertisements VS Non Purchasing behaviour from Online Advertisements (Survey of 261 participants)*

We noted that the percentage of users who opted not to purchase from online adverts were significantly higher than those who choose to. This could be due to factors such as: no interest in product, do not trust the specific 'brand', brand does not have a reputation, product which is advertised is not for them and many other reasons. In this part of analysis we will measure the fixed variable of time spent on social media platforms against whether or not users purchase or do not purchase from online adverts. We will be able to draw a significant picture of the relationship between the two, if it exists. See chart 8 below:





*Chart 8: Time spent on Social Media VS Purchasing from Online Advertisements (Survey of 261 participants)*

As we see from the graph above, there is no significant relationship between time spent on social media platforms and the likelihood of users purchasing from online advertisements. It is premature to suggest otherwise, as we can observe in all instances the average of people who do not purchase from online advertisements are significantly higher than those who do. Proving that online advertising is not as effective to persuade a user on social media platforms to purchase from that platform. In comparison to 4.2.2, we can suggest that online advertising (targeted advertising) is reasonably successful in advertising products to viewers and users of the platforms. This lack of relationship between advertising and its' capabilities to generate transactions online could be due to several factors. Question 5, of our survey asked participants, 'If you do not shop online, why not?'. We filtered through the 153 responses and characterised each response to a group and some fell into more than

one group. 58 out of the responses received were not applicable as they did not provide any reason for their response. We were left with 102 and reliable votes that allowed us to create a small table of reasons which could potentially influence a user in their online purchasing behaviour. The table below will the reasons provided for not shopping online

Reason	No. of responses	Percentage (%)
Unable to see / try the product	<b>70</b>	<b>45.75%</b>
Convenience / goods in hand	<b>14</b>	<b>9.15%</b>
Refund / return hassle	<b>7</b>	<b>4.58%</b>
Support local businesses	<b>5</b>	<b>3.27%</b>
Social interaction	<b>4</b>	<b>22.61%</b>
Shipping cost	<b>2</b>	<b>1.31%</b>
N/A	<b>58</b>	<b>37.91%</b>

*Table 3: Reasons influencing social media user Online Shopping behaviour*

Listed above are some of the possible factors why users are not influenced to purchase from online advertisements or online E-Commerce portals. In order to get a better understanding of the factors that stops users from shopping online, a separate research needs to be conducted to study each factor in-depth.

Henceforth, we propose the conclusion that, advertising online (targeted advertising) is not as persuasive in getting social media users to purchase online. Though there are many benefits to conducting online transactions, other factors like user behaviours, demographics, internet knowledge, play an important role in this process. We can prove that the time they spend on social media does not play a role in assisting online advertisers to gain purchases from users even though they are fairly successful in redirecting users to their websites (online shops).

#### 4.2.4 Additional Data

Through the process of conducting this survey, we obtained additional data which is worth highlighting, for the purpose of shedding more light on the phenomenon of users online shopping behaviours in relation to their time spent on social media platforms. Question 1, asked participants to highlight which age group they are in by answering a range scaled question. The options available were 'Under 18', '18-24', '25-34', '35-44', '45-54', '55-64', and '65+'. We applied a similar filter in the analysing data process to identify which age group were more likely to shop online, in comparison to another. We identified that the group with the highest percentage of shopping online, were those in the age group of '25-34'. Before we move on and share the data, we would like to highlight that this data though it may give a brief idea of the more likely groups to shop online, needs to be examined in more detailed as there may be other factors which could influence the actual representation of age groups in relation to purchasing/shopping online. In our study, 43.85% out of 260 of our participants were from that age group, therefore creating an uneven representation of sample sizes across each age group – hence the suggestion of conducting a more detailed study in this area. 1 participant who conducted the survey, skipped the first question therefore the representation of that individual's age is not available. The chart below reflects on the age range of participants and the number of responses received from each particular age group.

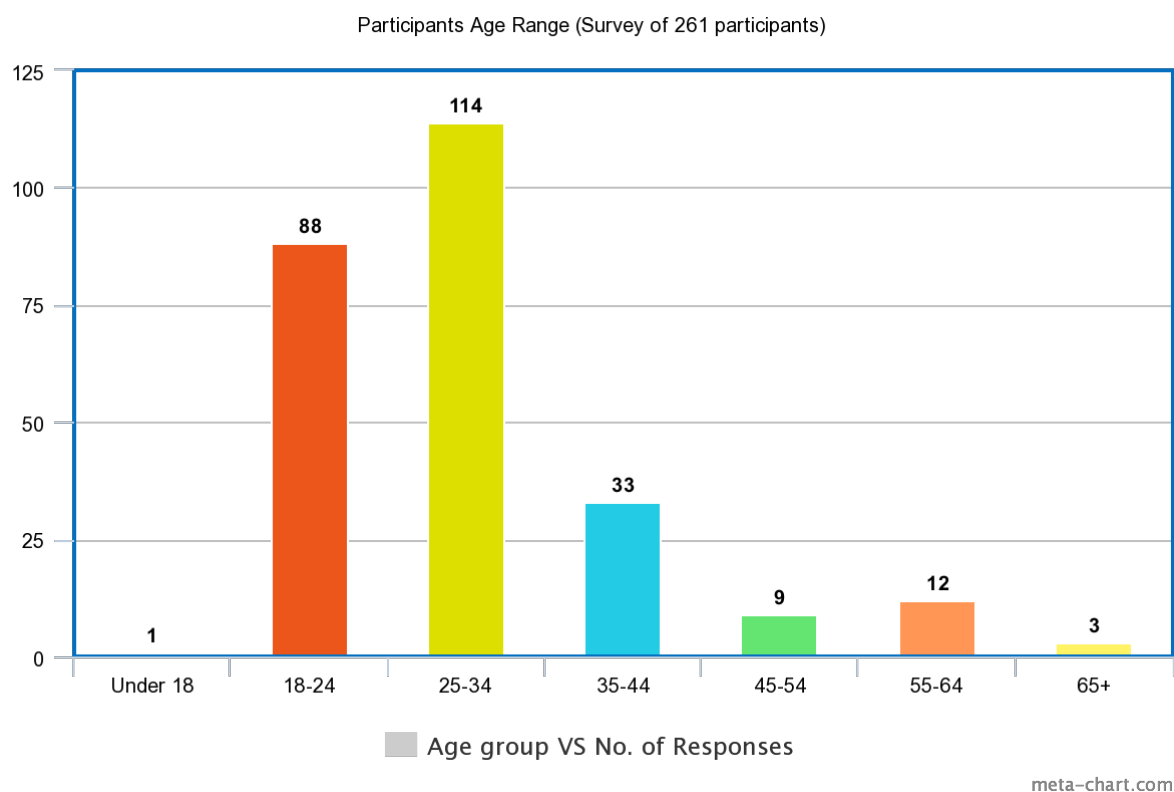
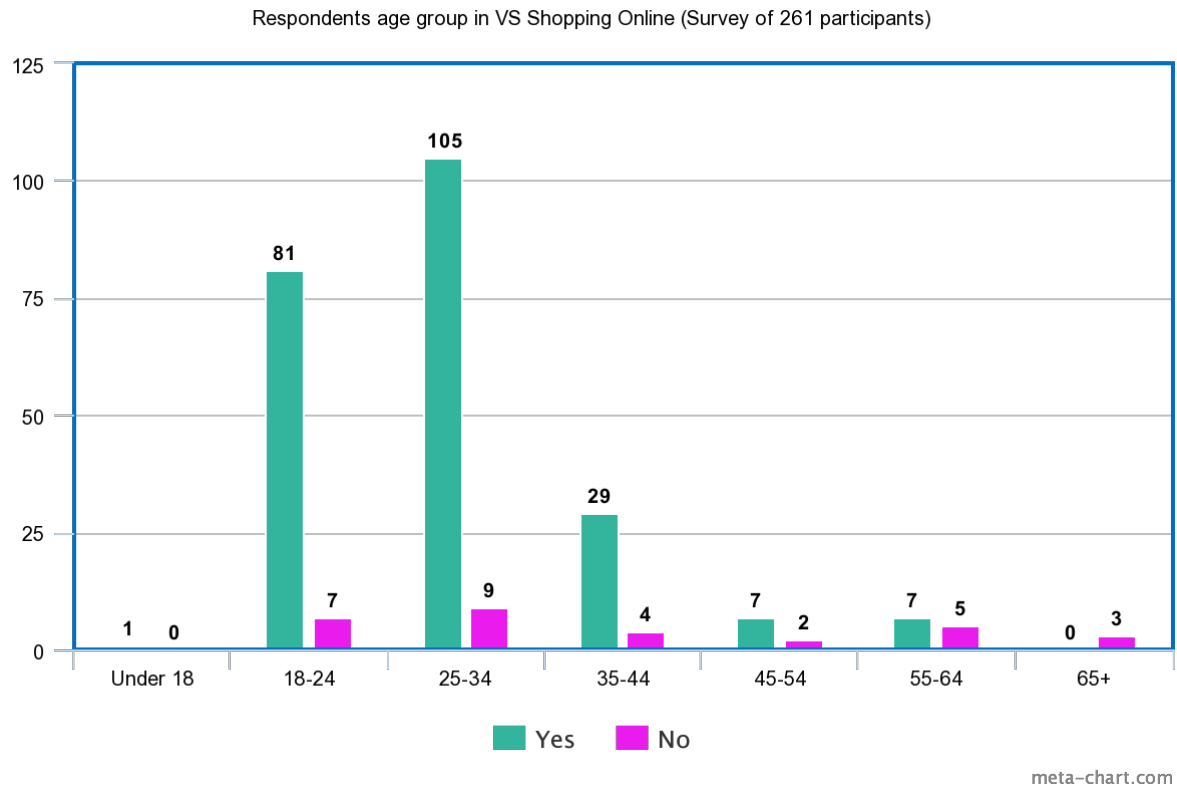


Chart 9: Participants Age Group VS No. of responses

Age Group	Number	Percentage
Under 18	1	0.38%
18-24	88	33.85%
25-34	114	43.85%
35-44	33	12.69%
45-54	9	3.46%
55-64	12	4.62%
65+	3	1.15%

Table 4: Percentage of responses VS Age Group

From the data we can see that, the three age groups which acquired the most responses are '18-24', '25-34', and '35-44'. In the chart below, we can see the relationship between the users age group and if there is a relationship between their age and their behaviour towards shopping online.



*Chart 10: Participants age group VS Shopping Online (Survey of 261 participants)*

As we can observe that, 92.05% of participants who fall under the '18-24' age group do shop online. In similar fashion as above, participants who fall under the '25-34' age group had a 92.11% response rate towards shopping online. These figure slightly higher from the age group '35-44', which had a percentage of 87.88%. This data, could raise several questions and areas of study in this field. There are several factors which could lead to the possible justification of these results, such as exposure to online shopping from an early stage in life, being experienced and well-versed about online shopping and being comfortable with it, having great experience shopping online previously and etc. It is interesting to note that as we go up in the age group, the percentage between those who shop online and do not shop online drop significantly. With '45-54' at 77.78%, '55-64' at 58.33% and 65+ at 0%. Opening the room for future research and studies, which could investigate this gap.

### 4.3 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to identify if users who spent more time on social media platforms are more inclined to shop online and if these can be considered a factor of influence towards the users' behaviour. After conducting the survey which received a response of 261 participants (which was set to represent the sample size of active social media users), we analysed that data and have drawn several conclusions in relation to these questions. It is noticeable that, the time spent on social media platforms does not play a huge influence towards users' online shopping attitudes. We observed that, regardless of the hour spent online, majority of the participants / users, do still shop online. Allowing us to eliminate time being a factor influencing users' purchasing habits.

Moving on, we concluded that, online advertising (targeted advertising), may be a good method of marketing in getting users to click and redirect but it is not efficient in getting a high frequency of repeat clicks. Based on the data we received though 80.1% of users said they do click on online advertisements, it was not very frequent. We suggested that there are several factors which could lead to this reflection of the data, but that needs to be studied in more depth to get a better view of what those factors are.

Last but not least, in relation to the second conclusion even though online adverts (targeted advertising), is capable of getting that many clicks on social media platforms, it does not necessarily lead to conduct of online purchase. Based from the data we observed that a mere 16.1% of participants bought from online advertisements which lead us to the conclusion that it is not an effective form of generating sales as opposed to just publishing products, brands or merchandise. Data also showed that, the time users

spent on social media networking platforms did not reflect towards purchasing from online advertisement, which meant the response was random and deeper research needs to be conducted to identify what persuades a user to purchase from online advertisements.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion & Discussion**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

To conclude this study, we will break up the discussions and conclusion into 3 parts, whereby we will tackle each research question which was proposed at the start of this study. We will also discuss possible managerial improvements which can be conducted by utilising the data achieved from this study. Moving forward, we will highlight what we think could be improved in future studies in the fields of internet studies, marketing and social behaviour.

#### **5.1.1 Research Question 1**

**RQ1: How does the consumption of social media influence a user's online purchasing habits?**

With the completion of this study, we are able to conclude that, the time social media users spend on social media platforms (Facebook & Instagram), does not influence their online purchasing habits (online shopping). The general assumption that is made, which suggest that the more an individual is exposed to a media product the likelihood of them being influenced by it is higher. As suggested in the media effect theory, which suggested that viewers who were to consume more violent content on television or political content are more likely to act in a certain way or to develop a certain bias or influence towards their behaviors or political decisions. We wanted to test this theory in the realm of marketing and advertising online, in order to identify if this theory does stand up in the new age of media consumption and distribution.



We conducted a survey with question which would provide us with numerical data representation of the time users spent on social media, in relation to their purchasing habits. After designing the questions accordingly, we determined a sample size of 261 participants which represented 2.7 billion active social media users. 88.5% of the responses that we received said that they do shop online. From there we compared the answer against the ratio of those who do not shop online in order to identify if as we go up in time spent on social media platforms, whether we saw an increase in online shopping in each category. Evidently, there was no visible connection between these two factors.

We discuss that, online shopping has become a socially acceptable norm and is no longer a strange manner of conducting transactions. These findings might be a beneficial to businesses who are interested in venturing into the e-commerce world and are uncertain of the stability and faith which is in the industry. We note that, even though most of our respondents said that they do shop online, 69% of the respondents believes that online shopping will never replace traditional brick and mortar style shopping. A note in point for business who have fears of online shopping replacing the traditional means of shopping. Therefore, the proposition that the time spent on social media can influences a user's behaviors, is not recognized in this study and therefore not true, even though it may apply under other circumstances, we failed to identify a relationship between both entities in this study.

### **5.1.2 Research Question 2**

**RQ2: How effective is targeted advertising in redirecting users?**

From the same survey conducted, we were able to identify the effectiveness of online advertising (targeted advertising) in redirecting users off social media platforms and onto their websites (online shops). After identifying this, we examined the effectiveness of online advertising, we examined the ability of online advertising in getting users to successful click on their ads, by measuring the frequency of which they usually click on online advertisements. From there we also looked if time spent on social media, played a reason in the results that we obtained.

A total of 80.1% of participants respondent to clicking on online advertisements. From this data we concluded that, we then compared it to the frequency of users / participants in clicking online advertisements. Which allow us to create an argument of the effectiveness of online advertising in redirecting users of social media platforms. The table below, shows the frequency range set during the survey and the number of respondents each frequency obtained.

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Always	1	0.38%
Usually	15	5.75%
Sometime	65	24.9%
Rarely	128	49.04%
Never	52	19.92%

*Table 5:Reoccurrence percentage , based on respondents numbers from range-scaled question (Survey of 261 participants)*

From this we concluded that, even though online advertising is a much more common occurrence today and is capable of redirecting users of social media platforms and their online browsing activities, they do not happen very frequently. As we can see that almost half of our respondents (49.04%) say that they 'Rarely', click on online ads. We suggest that, there are several factors which could influence this process and that a more detailed research needs to be conducted to understand, what ads appeal to users and what does not, and also to identify what drives users to click on certain

online advertisements as opposed to others. The data may seem contradictory to each other as 80.1% do click on adds, but the frequency of the occurrence is very minimal therefore we concluded that it is not as effective as it seems. We can acknowledge that, online advertising is definitely making an impact online as is being noticed, if at least a 100% of our respondents had some sort of response towards the test, suggesting that they have or may have come across online advertising and they may have had past engagements with it.

### **5.1.3 Research Question 3**

**RQ3: Does the prolonged exposure to media advertisements influence user's purchasing habits?**

After examining the two factors above, we took the study one step further to identify if these two factors combined had any influence on users purchasing from advertisements on social media platforms. We already knew that the time spent on social media did not influence users purchasing habits, we also knew that it did not influence the frequency of users clicking on online advertisements. We now wanted to identify, from those who click on online advertisements, how many of them purchase from the advertisements they click on or come across on social media platforms. We gathered the data from our 261 participants to identify if they purchase from online advertisements. This allowed us to create a cleared link between the three main research questions that has been studied.

Out of our 261 participants, a total of 219 (81.9%) participants, responded to not shopping or purchasing from advertisements they come across online. From this we

concluded that, online advertisement is not as effective in generating online transactions, upon comparing the responses to the time users spent on social media daily, there was so significant relationship between the two factors either. We suggest, that there are several factors which influences these decisions among users, as we filtered through 153 responses and characterised each response to a group, and some in more than one groups, based on the 'reasons' of their response. 58 out of the responses received were not applicable as they did not provide a reasoning in their response. We were left with 102 and reliable votes to a particular category which allowed us to create a small table of reasons which could potential influence a user in their online purchasing behaviour – leading to the suggestion that there are more factors which need to be looked into, in order to fully understand how social media users decided whether to purchase from online advertisements.

## **5.2 Discussion**

We think it is safe to say that, online shopping has become more than an occurrence which happens at random. Based on the data we have obtained, we can say that online shopping has grown in popularity in the media age we live in, therefore making it a more socially acceptable activity. From the first part of this study, we see a positive response in support of online shopping, which we then move on to see a relatively positive light on online advertisement but it lacks consistency, and in the last part we see a really low support towards shopping from advertisements. From this we can draw an assumption that, online advertising could play a good role in putting images of products, objects, brands and etc in the minds and sub-conscious of social media users. Suggesting that, if media cant' tell you what to think, they can tell you what to think about. Therefore, managers need to identify this 3 way relationship that, online

advertising allows for the successful marketing and promoting of a product and brand, but it lacks in generating sales online. Online shopping and sales have become an online activity by itself, similar to browsing social media platforms. We suggest that, online retailers create user friendly interfaces, websites and mobile applications in order to ease the use and enhance the experience their potential customers are about to receive.

Therefore we conclude this paper, with the suggestion that, yes online advertising (targeted advertising), is important to implant messages of products into the head of the users but more attention should be directed to the ease of your website (online shop). As there is not sufficient proof to show the succession of obtaining direct sales from advertisements on social media platforms (i.e. Facebook & Instagram). In this instance, where social media is used to implant the ideology of purchasing a certain product or brand, then the time spent on social media platforms and the effectiveness of online advertising (targeted advertising), becomes a crucial element of your marketing plan.

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## Appendix

### List of Diagram

Diagram 1: User profiling process (Bozdag,2013) .....	35
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### List of Tables

Table 1: Time spent on Social Media VS Shopping Online (%) (Survey of 261 participants).....	65
Table 2: Reoccurrence percentage , based on participants responses(Survey of 261 participants).....	69
Table 3: Reasons influencing social media user Online Shopping behaviour .....	74
Table 4: Percentage of responses VS Age Group .....	76
Table 5:Reoccurrence percentage , based on respondents numbers from range-scaled question (Survey of 261 participants) .....	82

### List of Equations

Equation 1: Margin of Error Formula (SurveyMonkey,2019).....	54
Equation 2: Sample Size Formula (SurveyMonkey,2019) .....	54

### List of Charts

Chart 1: Social Media Month Users (2019) .....	23
Chart 2: Participants who shop online VS those who do not shop online (Survey of 261 participants).....	64
Chart 3: Time spent on Social Media VS Shopping Online (Survey of 261 participants) .....	65
Chart 4: Online Shopping the future of Commercial Transactions (Survey of 261 participants).....	66
Chart 5: No. of participants who click on online advertisements (Survey of 261 participants).....	68
Chart 6: Time Spent on Social Media VS Users Clicking on Online Advertisements (Survey of 261 participants) .....	69
Chart 7: Purchasing behaviour from Online Advertisements VS Non Purchasing behaviour from Online Advertisements (Survey of 261 participants) .....	72

Chart 8: Time spent on Social Media VS Purchasing from Online Advertisements (Survey of 261 participants) .....	73
Chart 9: Participants Age Group VS No. of responses .....	76
Chart 10: Participants age group VS Shopping Online (Survey of 261 participants)	77